United Nations S/PV.6950

Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6950th meeting
Wednesday, 24 April 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gasana	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Musayev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Mrs. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-30970 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Botswana, Brazil, Djibouti, Egypt, Iceland, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in this meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States, to participate international in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: Last week, the Council heard briefings that described in grim detail the tragedy unfolding inside Syria and its dramatic humanitarian consequences in the absence of a political solution that could bring about a new and democratic Syria. This is a moment of increased risk and instability across the Middle East, and there is a need for quick and concerted action to address the humanitarian situation, both inside and outside Syria. Lebanon and Jordan are on the front line and must be supported effectively.

Action must also be taken on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The fragile hope triggered by the renewed United States engagement must be sustained and translated into serious efforts on the part of the parties. The desire for peace needs to be cultivated by early measures to reverse negative trends on the ground and build trust.

Last month's visit of United States President Obama marked an important opening. Secretary Kerry's subsequent trips and continued engagement with the parties and regional leaders demonstrate a serious commitment to breaking the political deadlock. It was in support of these efforts for renewed meaningful talks that the Secretary-General met with President Obama on 11 April. The two agreed that there is at least a window of opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to resume negotiations. The Secretary-General reconfirmed the United Nations commitment to supporting, including through the Quartet, a substantive initiative with a defined political horizon to achieve a two-state solution. He spoke to the urgency of making progress towards peace.

In the margins of the Group of Eight meeting on 10 April, ministers recommitted themselves to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. They further agreed on the need for a major international effort, involving regional parties and the Quartet, to drive the peace process forward. Now is the time for the international community to work in a concerted manner and without delay. During the recent Doha Summit, Arab leaders reconfirmed their intention to send a ministerial delegation to Washington, D.C., on 28 April to discuss the peace process.

Of course, much depends on whether the parties have the political will and exercise the bold leadership required to create conditions conducive to the resumption of a political process, despite the considerable differences between them and the risk that events on the ground could overtake new efforts at engagement.

In a development of note, on 13 April President Abbas accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad. The Prime Minister is expected to continue

carrying out his functions as caretaker until a new Prime Minister is announced. The United Nations recognizes that Prime Minister Fayyad had to contend with circumstances that kept constraining the success of the statebuilding agenda he led together with President Abbas and which is now, in the absence of a credible political horizon, at serious risk. We remain committed to working with our Palestinian partners, under the leadership of President Abbas, towards statebuilding and development, and to achieving the long overdue negotiated two-State solution.

In an encouraging development Israel and Palestine, with the facilitation of several parties, reached an important agreement on 23 April at a meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board, which allows for an experts mission to the old city of Jerusalem in mid-May. The parties also agreed on the postponement of five resolutions taken by UNESCO's Executive Board. This agreement exemplifies how cooperation and dialogue can be beneficial to all Member States and also conducive to maintaining stability on the ground.

The financial viability of the Palestinian Authority remains at stake, and we continue to call for donors to step up their financial support. The budget approved by the Palestinian Cabinet on 28 March for the 2013 fiscal year reflects fiscal discipline, yet reveals the Palestinian Authority's continued and increased dependence on external aid to cover its expenditures in the short-term. The Palestinian Authority's efforts to expand its tax base and enhance collection will result in increased net revenue of $2.5 billion, and total expenditure will amount to $18 billion, more than half of which is for wages, even with the implementation of a net hiring freeze. This expenditure includes some $350 million planned for development projects, most of them to be financed externally and dedicated to rural communities in Area C. International assistance amounting to close to $1.4 billion will be required to cover the deficit. The most recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in March forecasted a worsening economic outlook for the current year, with slower growth rates than in 2012, and a growing financing gap for the new budget should foreign aid continue to decline.

The reporting period witnessed a considerable increase in Palestinian casualties, mostly as result of new clashes with Israeli security forces during Palestinians demonstrations that grew violent. On the occasion of Palestinian Prisoners Day on 17 April, some 3,000 prisoners went on hunger strike for the day and demonstrations were held in main West Bank cities, resulting in 11 Palestinians being injured by rubber-coated bullets fired by Israeli security forces. The issue of Palestinian prisoners has fueled much of the unrest, especially following the terminal illness and death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh in prison on 2 April. During the clashes that ensued, Israeli security forces killed two Palestinian teenagers and injured two more with live ammunition at a checkpoint near Tulkarem after they allegedly threw Molotov cocktails at the checkpoint. The case is under investigation by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and we look forward to a timely and public announcement of its conclusion.

We welcome the resolution in the case of Samer Issawi, who has reportedly suspended his hunger strike following a court ruling on 23 April that provides he will be freed to his Jerusalem home after he serves an additional eight months. We continue to call for a swift resolution to his case based on humanitarian grounds. The United Nations remains closely involved on the ground, and the Secretary-General has urged that a solution be reached without delay in order to end the prisoners' plight and to preserve calm. We cannot but recall that other fundamental issues incorporated in the May 2012 agreement remain unresolved.

Wide demonstrations were also organized throughout the West Bank on the occasion of Land Day on 30 March, but violence was relatively contained compared to previous years. Some 22 Palestinian protesters and four Israeli soldiers were injured on that day. Protests continued against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We reiterate that demonstrations must remain non-violent. We also urge the Israeli security forces to show the utmost restraint and to ensure the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully and freely.

In all, incursions by Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank remained at approximately the same level — a total of 303 operations compared to 186 in the previous reporting period. But the levels of violence have nearly doubled, with Israeli security operations resulting in two Palestinian teenagers dead and 724 people injured, including 352 children and six women. A total of 354 Palestinians were arrested, including a number of Hamas and Islamic jihad leaders. Thirty-five Israeli soldiers were also reportedly injured by protesters in the clashes during the period.

Clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have also continued. A total of 13 Palestinians, including six children, were injured by settlers, and over 600 trees belonging to Palestinians were vandalized. On 7 April, Israeli settlers reportedly spray-painted racist slogans on the walls of two mosques in a village near Bethlehem. In two instances, Israeli security forces arrested a total of six settlers, among them a serving soldier, suspected of involvement in so-called price-tag activities. Palestinian attacks on Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank resulted in ten injuries, including one child and one woman, and extensive damage to Israeli vehicles as the result of stone-throwing.

The reporting period registered continued demolitions and related displacements in Area C and East Jerusalem. As compared to the monthly average of 50 demolitions in 2012, 29 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished between 25 March and 23 April 2013, including 16 structures demolished yesterday, leading to the displacement of 40 Palestinians.

We remain deeply troubled by the continued developments with respect to settlement activity. Let me reiterate unequivocally the consistent position of the United Nations that settlement activity violates international law. Settlement activity further undermines Palestinians' confidence in the viability of the two-State solution. The Secretary-General is particularly worried about reports suggesting that the Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction has predicted the construction within a year and a half of housing units in the E1 area of the West Bank. Separately, initial approval was granted on 9 April to begin a new construction project in a settlement that is part of occupied East Jerusalem.

We are also concerned about the potentially negative impact on Palestinians of the continuing expansion of the Sderot Begin Highway through parts of the neighbourhood of Beit Safafa, occupied by the Israelis in 1967. Such actions are counterproductive to creating the right environment for peace.

The situation in Gaza has become increasingly fragile. The calm that followed the ceasefire on 21 November 2012 has been challenged, and there has been little progress on the more substantive underlying issues that formed part of that understanding. In an alarming development, over the last month, a total of 20 rockets, including three Grad rockets and four mortar shells, were fired from Gaza into Israel and towards the sea, albeit without causing injuries or damage. Explosive ordnance placed along the border fence hit an Israeli patrol, causing physical damages to the vehicles but no injuries during the reporting period. Israel conducted four incursions and two airstrikes into the Gaza Strip. Two Palestinian civilians were injured on 5 and 16 April by Israeli fire while approaching the border fence. In reaction to the shooting of rockets, Israel again closed the Kerem Shalom crossing from 8 to 11 April. Since 26 February, the crossing, which is the only passage for goods from Israel into Gaza, has been closed for 29 out of 56 days. The off-shore fishing limit has remained reduced from six to three nautical miles since 21 March, well below the 20-mile limit agreed by the Israelis and Palestinians in the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which remains in force and should be respected. The movement of Palestinians across Erez has been further restricted to humanitarian cases with special permits for several periods since 26 February.

In another development, on 17 April two Grad rockets fired from Egypt's Sinai peninsula exploded in open areas of the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat, causing no casualties or damage. The attack, claimed by the Salafist jihadist group, Mujahideen Shura Council, was the first such rocket-firing at Eilat in a year. The same group has previously claimed responsibility for rocket attacks from Gaza into Sderot on 21 March.

We continue to strongly condemn the firing of rockets into Israel. Those rockets, which are indiscriminate, are intended to sow fear and cause civilian casualties, and can trigger cycles of violence difficult to stop. We also call on Israel to act with restraint. At the same time, we remain seriously concerned about the impact of Israeli restrictions on the vulnerable civilian population in Gaza. The United Nations continues to support Egypt's efforts to fully implement the ceasefire understanding it brokered between the parties. In that regard, we continue to call for preservation of the calm, with crossings into Israel remaining open and the fishing limit line to be expanded in full implementation of the November understanding. The United Nations will also continue to work for the relief of the Gaza population, including by stepping up reconstruction efforts.

Demonstrations and sit-ins took place all over the Gaza Strip in front of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities on 4 April, protesting against cuts to its cash-assistance programme, which were necessitated

by budget shortfalls. Protests grew aggressive when a group of demonstrators entered UNRWA offices and threatened staff members, forcing UNRWA to close its offices until 9 April, thus preventing the Agency from providing necessary assistance to Palestine refugees.

Meanwhile, efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation continue. Hamas and Fatah have resumed informal working-level meetings but have not advanced in their discussions. On 2 April, Khaled Meshaal was re-elected Chief of the Hamas Political Bureau. A day earlier, President Abbas reiterated his position, in accordance with the Doha understanding of February 2012, that he was prepared to lead a technical interim Government, which would prepare for elections 90 days into its term. On 12 April the Chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC) handed a copy of the updated voter register to the Palestinian President and informed him that the CEC is technically ready to organize any election, once so decided. The voter register now includes over 1.8 million electors, both in the West Bank and Gaza, representing over 80 per cent of the total Palestinian adult population, of which 48.2 per cent are female. The CEC continues to organize the complementary municipal elections scheduled for 1 June 2013 in the West Bank.

On the Syrian Arab Republic, I will keep my remarks short, as the Security Council was already briefed in-depth only five days ago by the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria. Mr. Brahimi emphasized the need for a political solution along the lines of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and warned against the growing militarization and radicalization inside Syria. He reiterated the Secretary-General's call to stop the flow of arms to either side in Syria and called on the Council to consider an arms embargo.

The Security Council also heard detailed presentations on the humanitarian and refugee situation, as well as on sexual violence and children in the context of the Syrian conflict, by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Amos, High Commissioner for Refugees Guterres, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Bangura, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Zerrougui. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Council to hear directly about the challenges faced by the neighbouring countries most affected by the humanitarian spillover of the Syrian conflict, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, in their efforts to accommodate unprecedented flows of refugees from Syria.

As concerns the United Nations fact-finding mission to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, we are still in discussions with the Government of Syria on the scope and modalities of the mission. In line with his authority under General Assembly resolution 42/37 C and Security Council resolution 620 (1988), the Secretary-General intends to ensure that all credible allegations brought to his attention by Member States are considered and, if it is deemed necessary, investigated. The Secretary-General's position is that, at this time, the mission should investigate the allegations about incidents in Aleppo and Homs. While awaiting access to the Syrian territory, the experts of the mission are studying the information on the alleged incidents involving the use of chemical weapons provided to them by Member States. They remain ready to deploy to Syria within 24 to 48 hours following the Syrian Government's acceptance of the modality and scope of the mission.

The situation in the Golan remains unstable, with sporadic clashes between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition continuing on a daily basis. The military activities in the area of separation have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and Syria and to jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries, as has been highlighted by recent incidents. On two occasions, on 2 and 12 April, the IDF fired tank rounds and missiles in what they described as retaliation for gunfire aimed from the Bravo side at IDF patrols across the ceasefire line. Syrian authorities reported to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force that the missiles fired by the IDF on 12 April caused one fatality and injured several members of Syrian security forces.

The spillover of the conflict in Syria continues to be felt in Lebanon, particularly in northeastern border areas. On 21 April, at least seven rockets from the Syrian side fell on Lebanese soil in the villages of Dora, Aysh, Sahlat Al-Miyah and the town of Hermel, causing only material damage; no casualties were reported. The Lebanese Armed Forces deployed heavily in the area. In a statement, President Sleiman denounced the missile attacks on Lebanon and stressed Lebanon's role in hosting Syrian refugees. He stated that Lebanon is working on controlling the border in accordance with the Baabda Declaration, and that the Army and relevant authorities were instructed to take measures

to prevent attacks on Lebanon and protect the safety of its citizens. There were reports of three further airstrikes on Lebanese territory on 3, 4 and 11 April by Syrian military aircraft, none of which caused injury. On 8 April, the Lebanese Foreign Ministry raised the issue of the violations of Lebanese sovereignty to the Syrian authorities. On 14 April, two Lebanese civilians were killed and two injured in shelling from across the border in Syria. I take this opportunity to reiterate the concern of the United Nations that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon should be fully respected by all parties.

On 6 April, President Sleiman designated Tamam Salam the next Prime Minister, following the resignation of Prime Minister Mikati last month. Mr. Salam, whose designation received near-unanimous parliamentary support, has stated that he will form a Government to hold parliamentary elections and that he is in consultations with the parties regarding the character and composition of his future cabinet. It is critical that Lebanese leaders use this opportunity to continue to engage positively to ensure the early formation of a Government. The Secretary-General also calls on all Lebanese parties to respect President Sleiman's wise and courageous disassociation policy, designed to help protect Lebanon from spillover from Syria. The Secretary-General, concerned about reports that there are Lebanese fighting in Syria, both on the side of the regime and the side of the opposition, hopes the new Government will find ways to promote better compliance with the disassociation policy by all sides in Lebanon.

On 6 April, President Sleiman signed a decree postponing the parliamentary elections by one week to 16 June. On 10 April, Parliament voted to amend the current election law, suspending the candidate registration process until 19 May, so as to give the parties a longer period in which to agree on a new electoral framework. I echo Council members' call for swift progress to be made in ensuring speedy agreement on the electoral law, so that timely parliamentary elections take place on a consensual basis within the legal and constitutional framework.

Meanwhile, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and along the Blue Line has remained generally calm. Twice this month, President Sleiman publicly condemned Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace as breaches of resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, allow me to make the following observations. As the situation inside Syria continues to deteriorate, it is more vital than ever that everyone collectively works towards preserving regional stability. Advancing the Middle East peace process remains central to ensuring that the region is not at further risk of destabilization. Let me repeat what the Secretary-General has stated at every opportunity: there is now an opening to develop a meaningful initiative to achieve the negotiated two-State solution that will best serve the interests, rights and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. But it is not an overstatement to suggest that we are about to reach a critical point in the viability of the peace process. Whether that prospect solidifies or vanishes will depend on the direction that leaders on both sides choose to take, and on the level of regional and international support for new efforts.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas have reiterated the right commitments. The choice ultimately rests in their hands not to disappoint their people and to offer them, at last, real prospects for peace and security. The international community also bears a unique responsibility to help them move forward together. The United Nations welcomes the renewed attention that the United States is giving to the peace process. We stand ready to contribute to a return to meaningful negotiations in the period ahead, including through the Quartet and through broader engagement with all relevant partners. Despite the difficult regional context and the challenges on the ground between Israel and Palestine, we believe that this is a moment of opportunity that we cannot afford to lose.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Mr. President, I am honoured to address the Security Council today, and I congratulate you and your friendly country Rwanda on your presidency and skilled leadership. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Russian Federation for its leadership of the Council in March. And I thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the region.

We are already four months into this year and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — the territory that constitutes the State of Palestine — remains precarious, as the political

impasse persists and conditions on the ground continue to worsen. While many, in speaking of that impasse, have referred to the status quo and its unsustainability, we must face reality. There is no status quo. The situation has in fact never ceased to change, and regrettably not for the better.

Israel continues to pursue illegal policies aimed at altering the demography, character and geographic nature of the territory, directly endangering the viability and the very possibility of a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. That is being done systematically and deliberately, in grave breach of international law. As land confiscations, settlement construction and human rights violations continue, the prospects for achieving that solution are diminishing. At the same time, the belief that peace can soon be realized is also diminishing, as expressed in growing Palestinian civilian protests against the occupation. Israel's violent suppression of peaceful protests continues to cause casualties, further aggravating the situation, as do ongoing Israeli settler terror and havoc against Palestinian civilians and their land.

The combination is highly toxic and requires immediate remedy. Urgent action is needed to salvage the prospects for achieving a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – based on the long-standing parameters that are well known to everyone in the Chamber, parameters that form the foundation of the two-State solution and the essence of a historic compromise, which the Palestinian leadership has committed itself to and the international community widely supports. With each passing day, an opportunity is lost to reverse the damage done by Israel's nearly 46-year military occupation and to instead promote genuine peace, security and coexistence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

The Palestinian leadership has therefore welcomed recent efforts by concerned parties to revive the path of peace, including the important visit of United States President Barack Obama to the region in March. We welcome the priority accorded to resolving the conflict, the renewed commitment to a just peace and the efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to progress. We have repeatedly proven, in word and deed, our commitment to finding a political path forward for the achievement of peace. We have thus sincerely engaged in follow-up meetings with United States Secretary of State John Kerry, as well as meetings with the Arab ministerial follow-up committee, including at the Arab Summit in Doha. In that regard, the Arab commitment to peace, reaffirmed for over a decade in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative, is unquestionable.

Yet, we know that intention alone cannot overcome the serious obstacles posed by Israel, the occupying Power, which have repeatedly undermined and actually sabotaged past efforts for peace. We thus believe the following elements are imperative for facilitating a meaningful political process and the success of any forthcoming initiative. Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, must cease. That would constitute a serious signal from Israel that it is ready to negotiate in good faith an end to the occupation. There is a global consensus on the illegality of Israel's settlement campaign. Moreover, everyone is in agreement — colonization, expansionism and annexation are entirely incompatible with ending occupation and making peace.

Israel's leaders must realize that peace cannot just be spoken of from lofty podiums to appease the international community, while the occupation continues to be entrenched. They must demonstrate they are ready for peace and act to make it a reality. That requires a halt to all settlement activities and acceptance of the principle of withdrawal from the lands forcibly seized in 1967, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Accordingly, Israel must also accept the global consensus that negotiations begin on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and that only by negotiation can that border be adjusted between the two sides. Those steps would contribute to diffusing the situation, building the necessary trust and fostering the appropriate atmosphere for the launch of negotiations.

A further imperative is the release of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in conformity with prior agreements and consistent with international law and humanitarian principles. As indicated in our letters to the President of the Council in past months, their plight remains a priority for the Palestinian people and their leadership, with 17 April recently commemorated as "Prisoners Day". Sensitivities surrounding that issue are high, not least because of the illegality of their capture and the occupying Power's inhumane treatment.

Currently, 4,900 Palestinians are in Israeli captivity, among them are 235 children, 1,200 persons needing urgent medical treatment and 168 persons held under administrative detention without charge or trial.

Dozens more Palestinians continue to be arrested and detained every week in Israeli military raids throughout the country. The brutality of their imprisonment has drastically raised tensions, particularly following the torture killing of Arafat Jaradat in detention in February and the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh due to medical neglect last month, prompting widespread civilian protests.

Likewise, the plight of Samer Issawi, whose hunger strike has lasted for over 260 days in protest of his re-arrest and detention without charge, has galvanized Palestinian sentiments and remains of high concern. We salute from this podium Issawi's courage, victory and brave resilience in demanding his freedom and the resilience of all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres. While noting yesterday's positive developments in the case of Issawi, we reiterate our appeal to the Secretary-General and all concerned members of the international community, including the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States as the other members of the Quartet, to continue their efforts to compel Israel to release Issawi. He and all other Palestinian prisoners and detainees should be released and returned to their families and communities and not be exiled from Palestine.

Also, we reiterate our call for an end to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, which continues to debilitate and disfigure the Palestinian society, inflicting severe socioeconomic and humanitarian hardship, isolation and repression on our people, as recently highlighted by the humanitarian coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory and others. While recognizing the global financial crisis affecting all, that blockade is totally obstructing Palestinian economic subsistence and must end. It is an unjust situation for our people to bear, as well as for the donor community, which is constantly asked to pay the price for Israel's illegal occupation measures.

Partial or temporary remedies will not help; all of those critical issues require a political solution. As stated at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, convened in March 2013, by Norway's Minister for Foreign Affairs, efforts to solve Palestine's acute economic problems are essential, but will only be meaningful within the framework of a negotiated two-State solution. That is true of all the problems and crises that persist and are symptoms of the larger problem: the continuation of the conflict and the absence of a just solution.

The basis for that solution is clear and present in the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. What is needed is the political will to take action on that basis in order to overcome the prevailing obstacles and to advance serious negotiations so as to resolve all core issues within a set time frame. For that to happen, Israel cannot continue to be absolved of its legal obligations. It must be held accountable. The tangible efforts of the international community to compel Israel to abide by the law are long overdue and should not be considered optional. They are vital to stabilizing the situation and to giving peace a chance. The political impasse is unsustainable. Efforts to simply manage the conflict are unacceptable, as evidenced by the mounting pressure and protests in the occupied Palestinian territory against the backdrop of instability in the region.

We strongly hope that Secretary of State Kerry succeeds in his efforts, along with other regional and international partners, to launch a credible peace process. Those efforts must include the Security Council. The Council cannot remain passively on the sidelines, abdicating its responsibilities vis-à-vis the achievement of a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of peace and security in our region. Furthermore, in that context, we support the efforts of the Arab ministerial delegation that will soon visit various capitals, including Washington, D.C., with the aim of promoting a political horizon.

For our part, I once again in this Chamber reaffirm the commitment of the Palestinian leadership to a peaceful settlement in accordance with the two-State solution. However, I must stress that at the core of that commitment is our obligation to preserve the dignity of the Palestinian people and to ensure justice for them. Essential to that is the fulfilment of their national aspirations and rights, including the right of our refugees to return and the right to self-determination in our independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Before concluding, I wish to refer to two additional issues. On the internal Palestinian front, we continue to strive for an end to the political division. Active efforts are being made, under the leadership of President Abbas with regional support, to achieve reconciliation. We are grateful for the international community's

support of unity, which is a national interest of the Palestinian people and which we hope can soon be realized. Furthermore, we are hopeful that elections can soon take place in continuation of the democratic path that we have chosen. In that regard, although Prime Minister Fayyad has resigned, while commending him for his laudable and serious work at the helm of the Government over the past years, we wish to reassure the international community and to ask for its support as we undergo that transition.

Today, I must also express our grave concerns about the situation of the Palestinian refugees in Syria. As has been made clear in briefings over the past week, the violent conflict raging there continues to claim many civilian lives, including those of Palestinian refugees, hundreds of thousands of whom have fled Syria, again suffering displacement. That crisis underscores the ongoing plight of the Palestinian refugees and the need for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, as well as the urgency of a political solution to the tragic conflict in Syria. We appeal to the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold its responsibilities in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Before I begin, I would like to extend our condolences to the people of France following yesterday's bombing of its embassy in Libya. We also extend our condolences to the American people following the attack in Boston last week. Our prayers are with the victims, families and citizens of both countries.

I want to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador Eugène-Richard Gasana and the delegation of Rwanda on their leadership of the Security Council this month.

Last Tuesday, the State of Israel marked 65 years as the free and independent homeland of the Jewish people. On that historic day, six and a half decades ago, the leaders of the new Jewish State issued a declaration of independence. It affirmed:

> "We offer peace and unity to all the neighbouring States and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all."

Israel wants peace. Not a day has gone by in the past 65 years on which the people of Israel have not yearned for peace. Last month, during his visit to Israel, President Obama said "I know Israel has taken risks for peace. ... I believe that the Israeli people do want peace".

The Jewish tradition teaches that the world is sustained on three pillars: truth, justice and peace. Today, I would like to speak about the three pillars upon which a true and lasting peace in our region must stand. Those pillars of peace are the foundation that must remain standing in the shifting sands of the Middle East. Anything less would be a peace based on illusions and delusions that is bound to crumble.

The first pillar is that peace must be built on a foundation of education for tolerance and coexistence. Peace should be fostered in homes, taught in schools, nourished by leaders and woven into the very fabric of society. The Charter of the United Nations urges nations to "practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours".

It does not take an urban planner to realize that the Palestinians are missing the blueprints to build a peaceful neighbourhood. From cradles to kindergarten classrooms and from the fields of summer camps to the fields of football stadiums, messages of intolerance fill Palestinian society.

Under the Palestinian Authority, students learn history from textbooks that glorify terrorists. They learn geography from atlases that erase Israel from the map. Gaza kindergarten graduations feature terrorist dress-up. Five-year-old children stage plays that glorify jihadists and suicide bombers. Instead of learning their ABCs, Palestinian children are being taught hate.

Flip through the channels of Palestinian Authority television and one might find a children's programme featuring a young girl reciting a poem that calls Jews "Allah's enemies, the sons of pigs [who] rap[e] women in city squares". Apparently, that is what passes for "educational television" under the Palestinian Authority.

How can we expect children in Gaza to learn tolerance when their own leaders repress them day in and day out? Hamas has banned co-education, arrested women for riding bicycles and prohibited women from appearing in public with their hair uncovered. Earlier this month, the Hamas police pulled dozens of young men off the streets and brutally beat them for the so-called "offence" of wearing trousers that were too

tight. I would say that that is taking the phrase "fashion police" to a completely new level.

Month after month, the Council meets to discuss what is wrong in the Middle East. Where are the concerned voices in that debate for all the hate being taught to Palestinian children? Where are the cries denouncing the incitement that poisons the wells of peace?

The second pillar is that peace must be built on a clear recognition that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people. Since King David laid the cornerstone of a palace in Jerusalem 3,000 years ago, Jews have lived continuously in the land of Israel. They saw the rise and fall of the Babylonian and Roman Empires. They endured crusades and pogroms until the the Jewish State was re-established.

I have said it before and I will say it again — Israel is committed to two States for two peoples. In 1947, we readily accepted the United Nations plan to create two States in the region, an Arab State and a Jewish State. At the time, Arab leaders rejected the existence of a Jewish State. Sixty-five years later, one still never hears Palestinian leaders speak about two States for two peoples.

While President Abbas claims to march steadily towards peace, his actions fail to fall in step. Last November, the Palestinian Authority built a monument in a central square in Bethlehem depicting the boundaries of a Palestinian State. That State extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. Israel was literally wiped off the map. Conveniently enough — surprise, surprise — when foreign dignitaries visit Bethlehem, the monument is removed from its position and taken in for so-called repairs. As the old saying goes, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time".

The Observer of the State of Palestine just now cited things about Norway's aid to the Palestinian Authority. Surprisingly enough, according to Norway's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Palestinian Authority misled Oslo when it claimed Norwegian aid money had not been used to provide salaries for convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons. The Palestinian Authority has been using those types of underhanded tactics to funnel money to convicted murderers with blood on their hands. Last year, as the Palestinian Authority was threatening to delay paying its civil servants, it somehow managed to find the funds to triple — to triple — the monthly payment to terrorists.

So while President Abbas speaks about peace, he continues to publicly embrace Hamas. Abbas recently renewed his efforts to create a unity deal with Hamas, a terrorist organization dedicated to Israel's destruction. In an interview last month with the Russian network RT, Abbas went so far as to say that he did not see much difference between the policies of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Let me remind Mr. Abbas of a simple truth. Hamas and its extremist ideology are the enemies of peace. Their ideas do not empower Palestinians to build a brighter future; they enslave them in a darkened past. There will be no peace until our neighbours recognize Israel as a Jewish State that is here to stay.

Pillar number three holds that peace must be built on security. At present, the cities and communities of southern Israel remain under fire from terrorists in Gaza, despite the fact that there has not been a single Israeli settlement in Gaza since 2005. After 10 years and more than 12,000 rockets, the Security Council has not said one word to condemn the perpetrators. Israeli citizens want real assurances for their security. The situation in Gaza provides us with a valuable lesson concerning any future arrangement in the West Bank.

As rockets are flying out of Gaza, new and more sophisticated weapons are flowing in. Just this month, security forces detained a vessel off the southern coast of the Sinai peninsula carrying 60,000 rifles, RPG launchers, machine guns, hand grenades and ammunition. Ships like those routinely smuggle arms to Gaza and to Sinai-based terrorist groups.

It is no secret that Iran is the primary supplier of weapons and the greatest sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East. Yet earlier this month, the representative of Iran stood in front of the General Assembly to share Iran's so-called concerns with the Arms Trade Treaty. He had the audacity to say that the transfer of arms to the Middle East has gravely affected the security and welfare of the people of this region and led to many lost lives in recent years (see A/67/PV.71). That is quite an interesting statement to hear from a representative of Iran. It is like the Mafia complaining that the crime rate in New York is too high.

The Iranian regime spins lies almost as quickly as it is spinning centrifuges. The ayatollahs are threatening to combine their extremist ideology with missiles and

nuclear weapons. Make no mistake — Iran's ambition for nuclear weapons is the single greatest threat to the Middle East and the entire world.

The Iranian nuclear programme continues to advance at the speed of an express train. The international community's efforts to stop it are moving at the pace of a local train, pausing at every stop for some nations to get off and others to get on. Last month, there was yet another round of negotiations to reason with Iran and convince it to abandon its nuclear programme. Just days after negotiations ended, Iran announced two key infrastructure projects. Surprise, surprise — both of them expanded Iran's ability to process uranium.

At the same time that Iran is advancing its nuclear ambitions, it is providing guidance to Bashar Al-Assad to increasingly effectively butcher the Syrian people. As we speak, Iran is sending Hizbullah fighters to Syria to help execute their bloody plans on the ground.

In Lebanon, Hizbullah is building an army equipped with 50,000 missiles — more than many NATO members possess. They may now have access to one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world. Hizbullah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, claims that he needs such an army to defend Lebanon against Israel. The truth is that Nasrallah wants an army to more effectively butcher his Arab brothers and sisters.

Hizbullah does not feel the need to limit its brand of terrorism exclusively to the Middle East. Last month, a court in Cyprus jailed a member of Hizbullah for planning terrorist attacks against civilians. Yet that still is not enough for some European Union members to call Hizbullah what it is — a terrorist organization. It operates with impunity on European soil, yet some European lawmakers continue to insist it is a social services organization. It does not take a Sherlock Holmes to understand the obvious facts of the case.

The foregoing are just some of the threats Israel faces in the region. Any peace agreement must be based on reassurances for the security and safety of the citizens of the world's only Jewish State.

Since Israel was born 65 years ago, we have been forced to fight six wars in six decades to defend our very existence. We know peace comes at a price. We want peace, but not at any cost. We will not turn a blind eye in the face of the threats that surround us. Now is the time to put aside the distracting sideshows of the debate and focus on how we can lay the foundation for a genuine, lasting peace. It is naive to think that peace can come from grand statements and vague promises. It would be like trying to build a new house on a shaky foundation — the whole structure is at risk of collapsing.

For all those who believed that the so-called Arab Spring would result in the blossoming of a new Middle East, take note — democracy has not taken root. Instead, what we have seen is more bloodshed and more violence. To truly establish peace, we must build a structure that can withstand the rough winds of change that are sweeping the region.

Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." The architecture of peace has never been clearer. As we face historic challenges in the Middle East, it has never been more important to strengthen the pillars of tolerance, mutual recognition and security. Those are the blueprints that need to be followed by Israelis and Palestinians, and indeed by all people in the Middle East, if we are to live in peace, security and prosperity.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing.

We are witnessing a rapid deterioration in an already devastating situation in Syria, where at least 70,000 Syrians have been killed and millions displaced. The Syrian people continue to face deplorable attacks and massacres by regime forces, including the use of heavy weapons, aircraft and ballistic missiles.

We are outraged by horrific reports that hundreds of Syrians were killed over the weekend in the Damascus suburb of Jdeidet Al-Fadel. Those actions dramatize the Al-Assad regime's complete disregard for the lives of Syria's citizens, including its children. There must be full accountability for those crimes, and we urge the Syrian authorities to permit free and unfettered access to the commission of inquiry to investigate atrocities, as called for by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

The exponential surge in the number of refugees is among the clearest signs of this dire situation. More than 400,000 Syrians have fled in the last seven weeks alone, and Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and United Nations humanitarian agencies are approaching a saturation point. We applaud the generosity of the Governments and peoples that are hosting that exploding number

of refugees. We count on all of Syria's neighbours to continue to keep their borders open so that those fleeing the conflict can find safety. We call on all countries to fulfil their commitments to the United Nations Syria appeals and to consider what more they can do as the United Nations prepares to launch a new appeal next month.

We are deeply grateful to the Government of Kuwait for having fulfilled its generous contribution of $300 million to United Nations agencies and other international organizations.

The United States is providing more than $409 million in humanitarian assistance to meet health, water, sanitation and hygiene needs. We are also providing food aid, including enough wheat to provide a four-month supply of flour to more than 1 million people.

We commend the Syrian opposition coalition for its bold declaration of principles in Istanbul last weekend highlighting its commitment to protect the rights and interests of minorities, reject extremism, seek a political solution to the conflict, prevent the use or transfer of chemical weapons and preserve State institutions.

Secretary of State Kerry underscored the firm support of the United States for the coalition's commitment to a political solution of an inclusive, tolerant vision for Syria by announcing the doubling of our non-lethal support to the Syrian opposition to $250 million, to assist local opposition councils in building the capacity of civilian activists and link Syrian citizens with the Syrian opposition coalition and local coordinating councils.

We continue to support a negotiated solution to the conflict based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). We remain in close consultation with a number of countries to consider what more we can do to change Al-Assad's calculus and facilitate an orderly end to the conflict. We urge Member States to press the Al-Assad regime to commit to credible negotiations based on the framework agreed in Geneva, which calls for Al-Assad to transfer his full executive authority to a transitional governing body.

The presence of violent extremists in Syria, including the al-Nusra Front, and the dangers posed by chemical weapons are very real and deeply concerning. The Syrian people recognize the threat that Al-Qaida-linked extremists pose to their revolution, a revolution that otherwise stands for dignity and respect for human rights. They have been clear that foreign extremist ideology is not compatible with the democratic and inclusive vision for Syria for which many brave Syrians are fighting and dying.

We support the Secretary-General's efforts to investigate any and all credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Having explicitly requested a United Nations investigation, the Syrian authorities should give the team that the Secretary-General has assembled full and unfettered access so as to enable it to conduct its work comprehensively.

As the Council has long recognized, the conflict in Syria threatens the stability of its neighbours, particularly Lebanon, as demonstrated by the recent attacks in Hermel and Al-Qasr. Hizbullah not only continues to undermine Lebanon from within by violating the Government's policy of disassociation, but actively enables Al-Assad to wage war on the Syrian people by providing money, weapons and expertise to the regime, in close coordination with Iran.

The United States strongly supports Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and stability. We appreciate President Michel Sleiman's leadership during this turbulent period. We congratulate Tamam Salam as Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate. That nomination is a positive first step towards forming a new Government, a process that must remain Lebanese-led. We encourage Lebanon's leaders to adhere to the legal and constitutional framework for holding timely parliamentary elections.

Turning to Middle East peace, President Obama's trip to the region has led to a series of constructive talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The United States remains committed to trying to bring both sides back to direct negotiations, and our conversations have focused on crating the necessary climate.

The parties have agreed to engage in new efforts to promote economic development for the Palestinian people by removing some of the barriers to commerce in the West Bank and expanding private-sector investment in the West Bank. That is no substitute for serious negotiations, but we hope that those measures will increase the chances for successful talks.

The United States will work closely with both Israeli and Palestinian officials and Quartet representative Tony Blair to help move the process forward.

As President Obama said in Jerusalem, despite the evident challenges, "Peace is necessary, peace is just, and peace is possible". The United States will continue to support the Palestinian people and their efforts to build the foundations of a future State. We have recently provided $695.7 million in assistance, including $200 million in budget support to the Palestinian Authority. The United States remains the largest bilateral donor to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, providing more than $233 million in fiscal year 2012 and $113 million thus far in fiscal year 2013.

We continue to support Palestinian aspirations to the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian State. We look to the Palestinian Authority to sustain its work, revitalize the Palestinian economy and reform institutions to better serve the Palestinian people.

We must all reinvigorate our common pursuit of a two-State solution and comprehensive peace, recognizing that, of course, challenges remain. Rockets launched by extremists from Gaza and the Sinai into Israel continue to undermine those efforts and threaten the safety and security of ordinary Israeli citizens. As President Obama made very clear in his recent remarks to both Israelis and Palestinians, we all know how tensions and provocations on the ground can escalate and damage efforts to achieve a two-State solution. We urge leaders to refrain from provocations that complicate the resumption of peace negotiations and Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

Progress towards peace is urgently needed, not only for Israelis and Palestinians but across the region and the world. That goal remains at the core of our efforts.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank Mr. Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour; and the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Ron Prosor, for their statements.

This spring, the Middle East has been racked by two crises that require an urgent response on the part of the international community.

First, the urgency of the question of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been emphasized on numerous occasions and is based on the threat that the issue poses to the two-State solution, which is clearly the only fair and potentially lasting way to settle that conflict. We naturally welcome the fact that the United States shares that sense of urgency and has responded, and we are resolved to support their efforts to bring about a resumption of the peace process. We hope that that will result in the two parties returning to direct negotiations without preconditions and on a credible basis, with a view to reaching a lasting settlement addressing the full range of final status issues. Creating a viable political environment for such negotiations will include adopting confidence-building measures that will make it possible to end the cycle of distrust between the parties and prove to their peoples that a better future is possible through negotiation.

In that regard, we are concerned about the situation of Palestinian prisoners and the tensions that have resulted. Beyond the humanitarian aspect, which the Israeli authorities must be aware of and which should compel them to take speedy and appropriate measures, we call on them to respect the full range of their international obligations concerning Palestinian detainees, regardless of their status. Equally, Palestine's economic development must be encouraged, a task that the former Prime Minister, Mr. Salam Fayyad, particularly devoted himself to, and we have commended his decisive actions aimed at building the institutions necessary for a future Palestinian State. We attach great importance to the continuation of such good governance practices aimed at strengthening the Palestinian State's credibility, which have brought it the recognition and trust of the international community. It should therefore be possible to go beyond the project stage and promote development in Zone C for the benefit of the Palestinian people.

Moreover, ending the activities aimed at demolition and confiscation is clearly a humanitarian imperative, and we greatly regret the 16 demolitions that took place in the course of a single day only yesterday, as reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities. Furthermore, nothing can be achieved without the parties' willingness to work towards advancing genuine peace. We welcome the responsible attitude shown by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and by their statement supporting a two-State solution. That statement must be backed by actions: unilateral measures, particularly settlement activities, which are ongoing and violate international law, undermine prospects for peace and must therefore be stopped. As for the Palestinian Authority, we expect to see it make constructive use of its new status here at the United Nations. In connection with the prospect of a two-State solution, the issue of Palestinian unity remains a matter

of concern. We support President Abbas's efforts and call on regional actors to support them so that progress towards reconciliation under his authority can be made, and in keeping with international commitments made by the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Changing Israeli policy with regard to the Gaza Strip and ending the blockade are also prerequisites for progress in that regard. Such changes will strengthen those who support peace on behalf of a population that today ruled exclusively by Hamas. At the same time, of course, we need to bear in mind Israel's security requirements; we continue to condemn the rockets being fired on Israel and call for strict compliance with the truce.

I would once again like to reiterate France's readiness to contribute to a lasting solution, particularly in cooperation with our European partners. That faint hope must be nourished by the jointly agreed support of the international community, particularly on the part of regional actors, who must be involved in the quest for a solution in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative.

In Syria, it is difficult to detect any glimmer of hope. We heard only recently about hundreds of civilians, women and children, who were massacred by the regime and its militias in the Jdeidet Al-Fadel area. Four and a half million Syrians have now been displaced; one and a half million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The human scale of the crisis now stands at some 100,000 dead, the majority of them civilians, as well as tens of thousands who have disappeared. The question therefore arises as to when the Security Council is going to take the measures necessary to put an end to the suffering. We know what those measures are, as we have tried to get them adopted in this forum.

The first of them would be to refer the issue to the International Criminal Court in order to put on trial the war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been perpetrated in Syria, for which the responsibility falls first and foremost on the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Secondly, we should exert increased humanitarian pressure with a view to ending the indiscriminate violence being inflicted on civilians, such as the bombing of civilian districts by the regime so as to enable access for all those in need by ensuring cross-border access for humanitarian assistance and authorize competent non-governmental organizations to provide such assistance. The Security Council's message regarding those issues has, however, remained inadequate. Such assistance is essential to containing the flow of refugees, who are putting intolerable pressure on neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan and Lebanon, and thereby undermining the already compromised stability of those countries. We can only continue to commend their efforts to ensure that the borders remain open. We must listen to Mr. Guterres's pleas for the international community to mobilize and lend its support to the host countries; similarly, donors must also mobilize to rapidly make good on the pledges of aid made at the Kuwait Conference.

However, what is necessary, first and foremost, is a political transition that clearly marks a break with the past and responds to the Syrian people's legitimate aspirations to choose their own destiny in a democratic manner. In order to accomplish that, we have the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and the necessary clarifications that have been made by the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, in addressing the Council. Above all, we must ensure that presidential powers are transferred in full to a transitional Government. That is the sequence of events that can lead to the establishment of a transitional Government, with full executive powers and able to organize elections, a Government that we are prepared to work with in order to do what has to be done.

Unfortunately, we have not yet reached that stage; only last week President Al-Assad reiterated his rejection of it in a statement that ignores the reality of the Syrian crisis. The only glimmer of hope is to be found with the opposition, which we continue to support. As the result of a bold initiative by Mr. Moaz Al-Khateeb, which we commended, the coalition has recognized the principle of political transition and is committed to it, as was stated in Istanbul. We call on the international community to back that initiative, in order to give support to the only force that is ready to prepare the way for political transition. We sought a viable interlocutor, and now we have one, recognized by the Arab League and a majority of the international community; one engaged in establishing a Government that seeks to unite the various components of Syrian society. Such an actor is indispensable to the creation of the conditions for a political transition, and we in the United Nations must also take that into account.

Before concluding, I would like to touch on Lebanon, which is caught in the middle of this storm. We welcome the efforts adopted by the Lebanese

Government, under President Sleiman, to implement the so-called disassociation policy, the only policy that can protect Lebanon from relapsing into civil war. While events on the border continue to increase in number and violations by Syria of Lebanon's borders are growing, we appeal to the Lebanese people to continue to uphold the principles agreed on in the Baabda Declaration, in the interests of their country's stability. We welcome the fact that agreement was rapidly reached on nominating Mr. Tamam Salam as Prime Minister, as well as the efforts to ensure a speedy agreement on the composition of the new Government, and the organization of parliamentary elections on a consensus-based approach and within the constitutional time frame.

In conclusion, this is a region that is on the brink of disaster as a result of the Syrian crisis, as a result of the burden represented by the refugees, which is creating sociopolitical problems, and the problem of radical terrorism, which is spreading, as we feared, over the slaughterhouse that Syria has become. We cannot afford to ignore this region, which is strategically so crucial to global peace and security and which will, without our prompt action, spiral into a chaos that will spill over beyond the Middle East. We face a choice: either we support the resolute action of the international community by backing the United States in ensuring that the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians can move forward and produce a lasting settlement, or we do not. We must display similar enthusiasm in tackling the Syrian situation in our search for a political transition, an enthusiasm that we have so far failed to display, thus allowing the region to plunge ever more deeply into the abyss.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I would to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

Luxembourg fully associates itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union during this debate.

First, I would like to address the peace process in the Middle East. Today, we have an opportunity to develop a serious political initiative to achieve a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. Recent visits to the region by President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry are important milestones in the relaunching of the peace process. It is crucial that, for the sake of Israelis and Palestinians alike, both parties now make a genuine commitment to overcoming the stalemate, resuming negotiations and developing an action plan with a clear timetable. There is an urgent need to move forward. In the current context, doing nothing is tantamount to regressing.

Recent remarks by Israeli authorities reiterating their commitment to the two-State solution are a first step in the right direction. The new Israeli Government must now translate those words into action and adopt measures conducive to the resumption of talks by stopping all settlement activity and respecting the agreements reached with the Palestinians.

Luxembourg is indeed deeply concerned by the settlement policy. We deplore the initial authorization, granted at the beginning of April, for a new construction project, the pursuit of existing settlement projects and the demolition of Palestinian infrastructure. We also deplore the statements made last week by some members of the new Israeli Government in support of efforts to strengthen the settlements, including in the E-1 sector.

No one in Palestine will believe that the peace efforts can succeed if settlement activities continue, if the blockade of Gaza continues, if the construction of settler roads increases, if the wall of separation continues to tear Palestinians from their lands, and if administrative detentions continue. Such illegal actions only exacerbate tensions and suffering and undermine confidence in the future of the peace process. It must be emphasized that such actions are contrary to the vision of two States coexisting in peace and security.

Palestinians, too, must of course create conditions conducive to the resumption of talks by meeting their commitments, observing the Quartet principles and continuing their efforts to combat terrorism. We condemn, in this context, the rocket fire of recent weeks that has targeted civilians in southern Israel. Nothing justifies violence. Those attacks are unacceptable.

It is with regret that we learned of the resignation of Mr. Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister of Palestine. We take this opportunity to thank him for his service to his people in that difficult position, particularly with regard to the establishment and strengthening of Palestinian State institutions. It is important that his work be continued at this crucial time for the peace process.

Indeed, 2013 will be a decisive year. It is no longer time to listen, or even to talk. It is time for action, and, for

the umpteenth time, we must avoid giving rise to bitter disappointment and the anger and violence that follow. With its partners in the European Union, Luxembourg is ready to actively contribute to the efforts to revive the peace process, in close cooperation with key actors, the Quartet and the countries of the region.

I now turn to Syria. While the situation is worsening by the day, words can no longer describe the horrors experienced by the Syrian people, including the use of missiles and cluster munitions, torture, sexual violence and the recruitment of children for military aims. It would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all the crimes committed on a daily basis. Like others, we are gravely concerned by the possible use of chemical weapons. It is urgent that the commission of inquiry set up by the Secretary-General be able to visit Syria and given full access in order to shed light on all the credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons.

The list of crimes condemned by human conscience, unfortunately, grows ever longer. Those crimes must not go unpunished. We said it in January, and we repeat it today forcefully — in the absence of a credible process of accountability at the national level, a referral to the International Criminal Court is essential.

The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Amos, told the Council last week (see S/PV.6949) that Syria is nearing the breaking point — the point of no return. Syria is collapsing. It is therefore urgent for the Security Council to act before it is too late.

This past Thursday, the Council was able to take a first step in agreeing on a message calling for the lifting of restrictions on humanitarian access and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid across borders. It is absolutely unacceptable that the work of United Nations agencies in Syria should be hindered and that humanitarian convoys should be the target of attacks. All parties to the conflict must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including access for humanitarian and medical personnel and the protection of humanitarian workers.

At the same time, the Council called on all parties to the conflict to cease armed violence and stressed the need for a political process leading to a political transition on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). That message was a first step; we must now go further. If we want the Council to fulfil its primary responsibility under the Charter, we must overcome our divisions and work to bring the parties back into dialogue as soon as possible and to reach a political solution, considering the gravity of the humanitarian situation.

The Syrian National Coalition is a legitimate interlocutor on the opposition side. We must give it our full support, encourage it to increase its representativeness and inclusiveness, and focus its efforts on a common vision of the political transition so that it can ensure a political solution for the future of Syria and build on the proposals for dialogue made by Mr. Moaz al-Khateeb. President Al-Assad must realize that he cannot prevail on the battlefield or cling to power indefinitely. He cannot claim to represent the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The conflict has overflowed Syria's borders. No neighbouring country has been spared the security and humanitarian impact of the war in Syria. It is no exaggeration to say that Lebanon and Jordan face an existential threat. We once again express our gratitude to the neighbouring countries for the solidarity with which they continue to host refugees fleeing Syria. In this tragic situation, it is now more important than ever to deliver on the pledges made at the Kuwait City conference on 30 January.

For its part, Luxembourg has fulfilled its commitments and transferred the funds promised to United Nations agencies and programmes. Given the growing needs, our Government decided last week to make an additional contribution of humanitarian aid amounting to €1 million.

I will conclude my remarks by urging the Syrian authorities to stop the cross-border firing, and to fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and other neighbouring countries. We welcome the continued efforts of President Michel Sleiman to preserve the unity and stability of Lebanon. We call on all parties to respect the policy of dissociation adopted by Lebanon. In general, everything must be done to prevent the Syrian conflict from spreading to the regional level.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing this morning, and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their important statements.

The Middle East peace process remains central to events in the wider region. As President Obama said in Jerusalem last month, peace is necessary, just and possible. We welcome the efforts already undertaken by Secretary Kerry and the good will with which they have been received by the parties themselves. The United Kingdom stands ready to mobilize the European Union behind any decisive moves for peace. We share the vision of a world where the Israeli people live in safety and security alongside the Palestinian people, who have a sovereign, viable State of their own.

But if that vision is to be realized, both parties must urgently take steps to rebuild confidence and faith. Events this month present a mixed picture. We welcome reports of an agreement to end the hunger strike by Palestinian prisoner Samer Issawi. However, the United Kingdom remains concerned at the continued widespread use of administrative detention by Israel, particularly given Israel's agreement in May 2012 to limit its use.

The continued use of live fire by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) resulted in the deaths of two Palestinian teenagers. On the other side, Molotov cocktails were reportedly used against the IDF during clashes in Tulkarem earlier this month. My Government has called for an investigation into these clashes. There has also been a worrying number of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel over the past month. We condemn such actions. The period of calm since November has been welcome, and we call on all those responsible to respect in full the ceasefire. Lastly, the disturbing trend of settler violence continues. We welcome the investigations launched so far by the Government of Israel, and look forward to all perpetrators of such acts being held to account.

Economic and political stability is key to creating the conditions for peace. As my Foreign Secretary said on 14 April, we regret the news of Mr. Salam Fayyad's resignation as Palestinian Prime Minister. His dedication and energy allowed the Palestinian Authority to take great strides forward in building the institutions necessary for a future Palestinian State. We must continue to support these institutions. In this context, we welcome Israel's decision of 25 March to resume the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, in line with its international obligations, and we expect this to continue. The United Kingdom remains a strong supporter of and a major financial donor to the Palestinian Authority.

As I said in January's debate (see S/PV.6906), we want 2013 to be a year of peace for the Israelis and Palestinians. This will require Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to show the bold and decisive leadership needed to achieve the lasting peace that the people of the region deserve. We hope that they wil live up to our expectations.

Turning now to Syria, I would like to start by expressing outrage at this week's reports of the killings by Syrian Government forces of hundreds of people, including numerous women and children, in the suburbs of Damascus. As my Foreign Secretary said on Monday, this was yet another reminder of the callous brutality of the Al-Assad regime and the terrible climate of impunity inside Syria.

Our primary and urgent goal remains a political settlement to the conflict. We remain steadfast in our support for the efforts of Joint Special Representative Brahimi, but his room for manoeuvre is shrinking rapidly. The Al-Assad's regime's violence, fueled by the few countries that still support it, is becoming increasingly extreme, from the use of Scud missiles against civilians to the regime's alleged use of chemical weapons. We strongly support the Secretary-General's investigation into all allegations of chemical weapons usage, and urge the Syrian authorities to provide full, unfettered and immediate access to the investigation team.

The catastrophe caused by Al-Assad's brutal regime is rapidly becoming the biggest humanitarian disaster of the twenty-first century. Ten million people — half of Syria's population — are likely to be in need of humanitarian assistance by the end of this year. This includes up to 4 million refugees, whom the United Nations assesses will have fled Syria by the end of 2013. More than 50,000 more people have died since the last draft resolution on Syria was vetoed in July 2012, yet action by the Council remains conspicuous in its absence.

With our partners, the United Kingdom will do everything we can to support the moderate opposition in order to build pressure for a political settlement for a free and democratic Syria. Last weekend in Istanbul, Foreign Ministers from the Friends of Syria core group met with the National Coalition. In their declaration, the Coalition underlined its commitment to a political solution and transition, to guaranteeing the rights and participation of minorities in shaping Syria's future, to

rejecting terrorism and to guaranteeing the safety of chemical weapons, and reiterated its commitment to human rights and international humanitarian law.

In return, the core group of 11 countries reiterated their support for a political solution, agreed to increase significantly their support to the Coalition, and to channel all practical assistance through the Supreme Military Council. They urged the international community to provide more support to countries hosting Syrian refugees.

The United Kingdom commends Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq for their generosity in offering vital sanctuary to those fleeing Syria. Despite the strain on their resources, we urge them to continue to keep their borders open. The devastating impact of the crisis on regional stability underlines the urgent need for a political solution. There can be no doubt that the situation poses a clear and immediate threat to international peace and security.

But neighbouring countries cannot shoulder the refugee burden alone. The United Kingdom has provided $260 million in humanitarian funding, and has delivered fully on the pledges we made at the Kuwait donor conference. We call on all States to do likewise, and immediately translate pledges into actual financial contributions. Doing so will enable the United Nations to scale up its response. We hope that those countries that have yet to make financial commitments will reconsider their position.

The Syrian Government and other parties to the conflict must immediately remove all impediments to the delivery of aid. The situation outlined by Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos to the Council last week (see S/PV.6949) is totally unacceptable. Every truck needing a permit has to be signed off on by two ministers. As many as 10 notes verbales are needed for one aid convoy. The number of approved non-governmental organizations has been reduced from 110 to 29.

All parties in Syria must ensure that humanitarian agencies can deliver life-saving aid effectively, safely, fully and without impediments, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We call on the Syrian Government to urgently facilitate free and unfettered access to all areas of Syria, including to agencies delivering assistance across lines and across borders from neighbouring countries. The Security Council must address this issue urgently.

Finally, those who commit human rights abuses must be held to account. We call on the Syrian authorities to grant the commission of inquiry immediate, full and unfettered access throughout Syria. We strongly support calls for the Security Council to refer Syrian to the International Criminal Court. The United Kingdom remains at the forefront of international efforts to ensure that those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity feel the full weight of international justice.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The situation with regard to the settlement of the crises in the Middle East remains quite fragile. That was confirmed yet again by the renewed tension in early April when Palestinian fighters from Gaza fired rockets at Israeli territory, and the Israeli Air Force, in response, struck the Gaza Strip. In recent days, the situation in the West Bank deteriorated quite seriously when demonstrations, following the death of a Palestinian detainee, led to clashes with Israeli soldiers. Fortunately, that did not turn into yet another large-scale wave of violence.

That fragile situation, of course, is grounds for our deep concern. We affirm our condemnation of all terrorist manifestations, including the firing of rockets at the south of Israel. We agree that terrorism should be fought mercilessly. However, the use of force against civilians, the violation of human rights and the violation of international humanitarian law are also unacceptable. We restate our conviction of the principle that active assistance is needed to get negotiations and contacts between Israelis and Palestinians to resume. Negotiations must be resumed without preconditions, but on the well-known internationally recognized basis that is spelled out, inter alia, in the statement of the Quartet of international mediators dated 23 September 2011, which was reaffirmed in the statement following the outcome of the Group of Eight Summit in London on 11 April of this year.

Renewed armed confrontation and violence are all deadly for any resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. We urge all interested parties to abide by the November 2012 ceasefire agreements between the Israelis and the groups active in Gaza, and on that basis, to move towards a complete lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip. It is important to avoid any steps impeding the search for ways to unblock the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process as a whole. At the same time, the parties must make efforts to restore and

strengthen mutual trust. Especially important in that regard is, in our view, the halting of settlement activities and the resolution of pressing humanitarian issues, including those related to the violation of international humanitarian law with regard to Palestinian detainees and prisoners.

We welcome the agreements achieved leading to the suspension of the hunger strike by a Palestinian detainee. We note the substantial contribution of the departing Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Salam Fayyad, who was working to establish Palestinian statehood. The international community must remember that economic progress simply is not sustainable as a result of continuing occupation and the dangerous impasse around the Middle Eastern settlement.

In regard to the restoration of Palestinian unity, based on the Palestine Liberation Organization platform, that is not only an important factor for success in the negotiations process, but it is also a guarantee for the implementation of possible peace agreements. We are convinced that the relaunch of the negotiations process and transcending the accumulated mistrust can be served by a ministerial meeting of the Quartet, preferably with the involvement of Arab States and with the participation of Israelis and Palestinians.

The events in the Syrian Arab Republic have been unfolding according to a tragic scenario. We decisively condemn the siege by armed opposition fighters of the Aleppo metropolitan bishops of the Greek and Syrian Orthodox Churches. That criminal provocation again confirms the extremists' designs to fan the flames of ethnic and religious division. That was done just two days following the national coalitions in Istanbul, which presented a declaration guaranteeing equal rights for minorities, including religious minorities. That bears witness to nothing more than the fact that either its leaders are simply untrustworthy or they simply do not control the situation. After all, the incident took place along the Turkish border in the so-called liberated territory, which have been receiving generous outside assistance.

We are puzzled by the European Union's decision to allow the import of oil and oil products from those territories, regardless of how hard the authors of the dangerous decision — disregarding the norms of international law and the principle of international sovereignty — try to present their actions as a gesture of support for moderate opposition. There is no need to be a prophet to understand that the money will invariably flow to the strongest armed groups, and that those are the radicals and extremists, including terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaida, namely Jabhat Al-Nusra, which holds a great many of the oil-rich areas outside Syrian Government control. Also alarming is the readiness of number of States to supply illegal groups in Syria with arms, which, after all, risk ending up in the hands of terrorists raging around the territory of the country. If the idea of all-out war to the bitterest of ends, fueled by an aggressive minority of the international community, prevails, that will only further degrade the situation and lead to the growth in terrorist activity, including in neighbouring countries.

In contravention of the objective of initiating political dialogue, a number of allies of the armed opposition have been secretly pushing an extremely harmful draft resolution on Syria in the General Assembly. We also urge Members not to yield to attempts to sidestep, on the basis of various pretexts, the investigation requested by the Syrian authorities regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons near Aleppo on 19 March. Unfortunately, the Secretariat has not shown the requisite consistency and transparency here. The increasing confrontation reaffirms the need for a rapid end to all violence, for the respect of human rights, for restoring the humanitarian situation and for assisting internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring States. It is important to urge international humanitarian organizations and the Syrian Government to maintain the existing level of trust and constructive cooperation, preventing any undermining of that trust through artificial politicization of the humanitarian problem.

The current priority is to force all warring sides to cease all violence, to take a seat at the negotiating table and to reach agreement on the creation of a transitional governing body as provided by the 30 June 2012 Geneva final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/523, annex). There is a need to step up the joint efforts to implement the agreements and to avoid being drawn into the dubious campaign to legalize structures that seek to replace the legitimate Government of Syria, especially at the United Nations, the mission of which is after all to be the guardian of international legality.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): We express our thanks to the Under-Secretary-General of Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his briefing this morning.

As we know, the deepening crisis around the conflict in Syria is quite rightly an overriding preoccupation. It should be, but we should of course not also be deterred from the imperative of reinvigorating the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Australia supports all efforts to achieve lasting security for Israel and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State. A durable two-State solution will only be achieved through direct negotiations without preconditions on the basis of the 1967 boundaries and with agreed land swaps. There is a window of opportunity now to re-engage in the peace process, which we simply must not miss.

Australia welcomes United States President Obama's visit to the region and the work being done by United States Secretary of State Kerry. United States leadership is crucial. Prime Minister Netanyahu has confirmed his new Government's commitment to a peaceful two-State solution, to sit down at the negotiating table without preconditions, and to work together to end the conflict. And President Abbas said, the Palestinians were prepared to implement all their commitments and obligations. Those declarations need to be translated quickly into actions by all parties. There are some signs of a more conducive environment for Israelis and Palestinians to re-engage in direct negotiations. We welcome the restraint shown by Israel following recent rocket attacks from Gaza and urge all sides to abide by the November ceasefire. Equally, we welcome the restraint shown by the Palestinian Authority in refraining from taking unilateral action in international forums. Of course, more needs to be done by both sides. In particular, illegal settlement activity directly undermines the prospects for peace and threatens the viability of a Palestinian State.

Continuing donor support to Palestinian economic development is crucial, as is ongoing economic reform by the Palestinian Authority. We regret Prime Minister Fayyad's resignation at this important juncture. We appreciate his role in building the institutional foundation for a future Palestinian State and his efforts in promoting economic development and in driving reform. The Authority must not allow his achievements to be lost, and we must continue to support its efforts. We look to Israel to take immediate steps to ease restrictions and allow the development of a sustainable Palestinian economy. We welcome the resumption of tax transfers, but the clearance of tax revenues needs to be improved on a sustained basis.

We urge the Palestinians to cease all acts of violence against Israel, resolve their internal differences and unite for peace. The ongoing stalemate in the peace process is, of course, not in the interests of Israel, the Palestinians, the region or the international community, and it is well past time, but still possible, for that stalemate to be broken.

Just as the stalemate in the peace process has implications for regional stability, so too does the deepening crisis in Syria, where Palestinians are among those who are suffering from the conflict. There are approximately 500,000 Palestinians in Syria, many now facing displacement and discrimination. Like other Council members, Australia was chastened by last week's briefings on the humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria by senior United Nations agency heads (see S/PV.6949). The situation in Syria is now clearly at a tipping point. The scale of the humanitarian crisis, its impact on the Syrian people and its destabilizing impact on its neighbours and the region must be of decisive concern to the Council. The cost of further inaction is unbearable for the Syrian people themselves. It is also unbearable for Syria's neighbours, especially Lebanon and Jordan, but also Turkey and Iraq, which are facing destructive pressures from refugee flows, spillovers of violence and cross-border violations.

There were 3,000 refugees per day in January, 5,000 in February, 8,000 in March, and more this month. One in four of the people living in Lebanon are Syrian. One in five of the people living in Jordan are Syrian. As the violence worsens, the effects become exponential and our ability to cope collapses. All parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, must cooperate fully with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to allow access for these organizations and to remove obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance. As Under-Secretary-General Amos told the Council on 18 April, this needs to include cross-border access. The safety of all humanitarian personnel, medical workers and medical facilities must be ensured.

In the face of this growing humanitarian catastrophe and the direct threat to the security and stability of Syria's neighbours, the Council must act decisively to meet its Charter responsibility to maintain peace and security and to help end the conflict in Syria. Mr. Brahimi has made clear to the Council how it can support his efforts, including through building on the agreement reached by the Action Group in Geneva last June. It is well past time for the Council to respond to

Mr. Brahimi's plea and act firmly so that a political solution can be realized and the crisis brought to an end.

We call on both the Syrian Government and the opposition Syrian National Coalition to engage in meaningful genuine dialogue for an orderly and inclusive transition towards a future Syria that is democratic and exercises the rule of law. Respecting international humanitarian law, reaching out to minority communities, and rejecting and extremist ideology will be instrumental to the future Syria.

We remain seriously concerned over all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and call on the Syrian Government to allow immediate and unhindered access for the Secretary-General's investigation into those allegations. Should they be substantiated, the Council must be prepared to respond swiftly and credibly.

We are now in the third year of the Syrian conflict. The Council simply cannot continue to fail to do what we all know we need to do by beginning to end this catastrophic situation.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing on the recent developments in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Since the peace process was interrupted in 2010, the Palestinian cause has experienced an historic and decisive turning point, requiring the international community as represented by the Council to intervene to ensure the resumption of the peace process in the region and to expedite progress towards a comprehensive and lasting peace, which is the only guarantee of security and stability for all the peoples of the region.

The visit to the region by President Barack Obama and the initiatives of John Kerry offer a glimmer of hope for a reinvigorated peace process between the Palestinian and the Israelis aimed at achieving the two-State solution. We welcome that visit and the ensuing initiatives. We wish those initiatives every success in helping to reinvigorate the peace process and the negotiations.

In that regard, allow me to recall once again that the Arab side has repreatedly, and most recently at the Arab League Summit held in Doha in March, proven its committment to a lasting and fair peace in the Middle East as a strategic option, and to the principles of the peace process and, in particular, the Arab Peace Initiative, the significance of which has been restated at successive League of Arab States Summits held since 2000.

Experience has shown us that the flexibility shown by the Arabs and the Palestinians has unfortunately been stymied by the ongoing settlement and colonization activities, in particular in the city of Jerusalem. This poses a serious threat, preventing an internationally acceptable solution, as settlement activities have been roundly and consistently condemned and rejected by the international community. This practice infringes upon international law, flouts Security Council resolutions, and prevents the establishment of an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations.

We are all aware that the city of East Jerusalem has been the primary target of the settlement policy, which seeks to alter the geographic, cultural and demographic composition of a city that is of key symbolic significance to all practitioners of holy religions. Its nature cannot be modified. The city cannot be isolated from Palestine.

The Kingdom of Morocco chairs the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We call once again on the international community to shoulder its full historic responsibility to bring to an end to the violations of the sacred nature of holy sites, be they Christian or Muslim, and to ensure respect for the status of the city of Jerusalem as a territory for the coexistence of all holy religions.

The occupied Palestinian territory is facing dire economic circumstances. The further deterioration of the economic situation could endanger the economic gains made to date by the Palestinian Authority, thereby jeopardizing the creation of a Palestinian State. We can only welcome the efforts that have been made to resolve this situation and to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Once again, we call for an end to the blockade that has been imposed on Gaza since 2006. It is a form of collective punishment imposed on more than 1.6 million Palestinian, including more than 1 million refugees. We underscore once again the importance of ensuring that the ceasefire agreed last November is not violated in order to ensure that the lives of innocent civilians are protected. That agreement preserves the security of all parties concerned, without exception.

Moreover, we call upon the Palestinian factions to fully abide by the national reconciliation process in Palestine. The unity of the Palestinian State is a prerequisite for ensuring that the Palestinian interests are upheld in the negotiations and that peace is achieved.

With regard to the issue of Palestinian prisoners, we again call upon Israel to put an end to the tragic fates of thousands of prisoners in its jails, including the sick, those on hunger strike, children and those under administrative detention.

We support the ongoing Palestinian determination to achieve international peace through negotiation. However, the region cannot endure a further failure in the peace process. That is why, today more than ever before, all parties must do their utmost to attain a two-State solution based on a political plan that is clear and through credible negotiations within a specific time frame and in accordance with a well-defined mechanism that will allow for the achievement of a two-State solution based on the 4 June 1967 borders. We hope that 2013 will be the year of a political settlement that will finally enable the Palestinian people to forge their own independent and viable State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel.

As a non-permanent member of the Council, the Kingdom of Morocco shall support all regional and international efforts to revive the peace process and fulfil the hopes of all the peoples of the region for are a Middle East where peace, prosperity and security prevail. Let us do our utmost to ensure that the Israeli Government also demonstrates political willingness to contribute, as it has done in the past, to the creation of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the parameters recognized by all.

We have focused on the Palestinian issue because it lies at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. We fear that the lack of a solution will lead to tragedies for the future of present and coming generations, which would tarnish the Organization.

We shall never forget the ongoing occupation by Israel of the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon and we call upon Israel once again to withdraw from those territories so that a lasting and comprehensive peace may be achieved in the region.

Again, we restate our concern with regard to the situation affecting the brotherly Syrian people and its humanitarian impact. We are convinced that all forms of violence must cease and that the Council must be united in action in order to create an environment conducive to international efforts aimed at putting an end to the killings and to achieve a solution that will meet the aspirations of the Syrian people to freedom and coexistence among all its ethnic and religious components with a view to ensuring respect for Syrian national and territorial unity.

Once again allow me to recall our position, which is based on Lebanon's stability and the unity of its people. We commend the nationalist spirit of responsibility demonstrated by all the groups of Lebanese people in order to uphold the national sovereignty and territorial unity of Lebanon. We are certain that the Lebanese authorities are fully able, through dialogue and wisdom, to resolve pending matters and to reach agreement on the formation of a new Government so that the legislative elections can be held pursuant to Lebanon's Constitution.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): Let me commence by thanking you, Sir, for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his briefing and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

Discussions on the situation in the Middle East bring the whole set of pressing issues to the fore, the solution of which urges long-term dedication and the proper coordination of efforts by the international community. Although the Middle East peace process is definitely among such issues, the long-awaited breakthrough has so far been elusive. It is clear, however, that there is no alternative to peace and negotiations, and the establishment of the groundwork necessary for a credible peace process remains a core priority for the international community.

The latest developments in the region give hope that the situation may begin to move from its current standstill. Azerbaijan commends and supports the diplomatic efforts, particularly those currently undertaken by the United States, to facilitate the process, revive the negotiations and contribute to greater stability in the region. We also underline the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides the regional support for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out, all those involved should work to breathe new life into the peace process, create an environment conducive to the

resumption of negotiations, and establish a credible political horizon for achieving a two-State solution. As we have repeatedly stated, and I would like to stress once again, among the necessary prerequisites for success is the need to ensure that the process is guided by the normative standards set by the Charter of the United Nations and by the objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement based on international law.

Needless to say, the achievement of tangible outcomes will be impossible in the absence of strong commitment and dedicated efforts on the part of the parties. Settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute a serious obstacle and threat to the peace process and the prospects of achieving a two-State solution. Azerbaijan has consistently condemned and rejected settlement practices, which are illegal under international law and which must cease immediately and unconditionally. It is important that the parties uphold their commitments to the 21 November 2012 ceasefire agreement and refrain from any action that may undermine it.

It is also essential to fully utilize the advantage of cultural diversity by promoting intercommunal dialogue and reconciliation while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic and religious intolerance. We support the ongoing efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation under the leadership of President Abbas, and express our hope that Palestinian unity will soon be achieved.

Economic and development support for Palestine must be promoted. The humanitarian situation also demands continued international attention and assistance, particularly in order to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian aid throughout the region. It is also critical to put an end to the suffering of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

The urgency for renewed peace efforts is unarguable. The moment of opportunity must not be missed. We would like once again to express our firm conviction that peace, security and prosperity in the Middle East are achievable with greater political will, a stronger commitment and concerted efforts at the regional and international levels.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the Middle East. We thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his very insightful and timely briefing. This is an important time for Palestine and Israel, as well as the entire region. There is a slight tinge of optimism in Mr. Feltman's briefing today.

A flicker of hope appeared after the visits of President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to the region. That tentative beginning, after a long hiatus, should be leveraged to generate the momentum for engagement and a resumption of the peace process.

The Security Council, the Quartet and the regional leaders need to energize the stalled peace process. While different bodies, including the Council, must play their role, it is conventional wisdom that the most decisive impetus for restarting the peace process will come from Israel and Palestine. Working towards sustainable peace is in the interest of both countries. We all know that a leadership role by the United States could persuade the two sides to come to the negotiating table. The process needs benchmarks and deadlines.

In his report pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/19, the Secretary-General reiterates that an end to the occupation and the achievement of a two-State solution are overdue (see A/67/364). He gives us a stark reminder that the year 2013 will be decisive for the peace process. Similar views have been expressed by other regional and world leaders.

However, a two-State solution is rapidly vanishing. Palestine and Israel have not met for the past two and a half years. There is an impasse in the peace process. United States Secretary of State John Kerry warned last week that the window for a two-State solution is shutting after years of failure and that the chance to create a Palestinian State alongside Israel will be lost in one to two years. That is not a gloomy forecast. It is the reality developing on the ground. That warning underlines the sense of urgency for taking concrete steps fast. The two sides need to engage. To do that, they must overcome their persistent scepticism.

The ongoing settlement construction and Israel's plans for new settlements in the E-1 area will hinder the two-State solution by cutting the West Bank into two and destroying the contiguity of the Palestinian State. A one-State reality will be unlawful and unsustainable.

The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, established by the Human Rights Council, pronounced that Israeli settlements symbolized the acute lack of justice experienced by the Palestinian people (see A/64/490,

annex). The settlements deny the people of Palestine the right to self-determination and systematically discriminate against them. The report calls on Israel to comply with article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and to cease all settlement activities without preconditions. We concur. In the interest of both Israel and Palestine, new Israeli settlement plans must be frozen and earlier decisions rescinded.

It is in the interest of Israel itself to work towards a long-term and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ending the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and Lebanese lands is imperative in that regard. The establishment of a viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is the only lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

This is also a time for national cohesion within Palestine. The momentum towards building and consolidating the national institutions — interior, police, finance, health-care and education — must be maintained. The flow of financial assistance to Palestine should not slow down. We hope that the recent elections in Israel and the consequent formation of the Government will not be cited as justification for a reduced interest in the resumption of the peace process.

While we continue to push for a long-term solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, urgent measures must be taken to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

First, Gaza has become one big prison. As demanded by resolution 1860 (2009), the blockade on Gaza must be lifted. The heightened restrictions on the movement of people and goods, as well as on fishing limits, must be removed.

Secondly, checkpoints and barriers should be removed from the West Bank because they interfere with mobility and trade. The World Bank report to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in Brussels last month provides details of the damage to the Palestinian economy caused by Israeli restrictions. Productivity has halved since the late 1990s and the rate of unemployment has increased many times.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues should be transferred to Ramallah on time.

Fourthly, the inhuman treatment of the Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails should be stopped.

Fifthly, an independent investigation into the death of Arafat Jaradat in Israeli custody is overdue. It must be initiated and be concluded in order to bring the perpetrators to justice.

We welcome the agreement between Palestine and Israel on UNESCO involvement in Jerusalem. It is a small but important confidence-building measure.

Let me now turn to Syria. Syria is being decimated before our own eyes. Last week's briefings to the Council revealed that more than 70,000 people have been killed (see S/PV.6949). Syrians are killing Syrians. Foreign terrorist organizations have penetrated into Syrian territory. Summary executions are on the rise. More than 1.3 million Syrians have taken refuge in neighbouring countries. Some 7 million people inside Syria need humanitarian attention and assistance. The crisis is assuming more sinister dimensions by the day. Violence and refugees are threatening to embroil the whole region in a wider conflict.

The dictates of realpolitik have immobilized the international community and the Council from making any meaningful intervention. Matters have reached a tipping point. The competing doctrines of militarization and military triumph are choking conduits for dialogue and diplomacy.

The supply of weapons to all sides should be halted. Within the opposition, some entities and outfits are allied to Al-Qaida. Judging by the Libyan experience, such weapons will end up in the hands of terrorists, who could plunge the entire region into a wider crisis.

Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi and the other briefers last week made impassioned pleas to the Council to work towards a political solution. We continue to feel that the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) contains all the right ingredients for political dialogue and dispensation. No other alternative is in sight. Syrians, regional countries and major Powers need to sit with Mr. Brahimi to implement the Geneva communiqué. If there is any fresh thinking, it needs to be developed rapidly and shared with Council members. We earnestly hope that that will happen without delay to stop further carnage in Syria.

We appeal to all sides to continue to trust Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as a mediator. It is also important

that he continue to represent both the Secretary-General and the Arab League.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Although the intervals between meetings where we take up this issue are short, the situation in the Middle East is dynamic enough to provide new developments each time. Thus, in recent months there have been some significant developments that are worthy of comment. I will therefore focus on two topics today — the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Middle East peace process.

Regarding the situation in Syria, the Council's work has been focused on finding a political solution to the conflict that has wracked the country, but despite the many efforts undertaken, we have seen only an increase in the use of violence, both by the Government and by the armed opposition, all of which has resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, the suffering of millions of people, and a humanitarian crisis of the most serious dimensions. Worse still, the trend shows no signs of improving, as both parties are governed by the logic of military victory over the other, but with very little prospect of achieving that goal. That is why Guatemala continues to strongly believe that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is for both parties to agree to lay down their weapons and negotiate a political solution.

We do not believe that the militarization of the conflict will solve the underlying problems that gave rise to demonstrations in Syria two years ago. Rather, the continuation of the armed struggle will serve only to increase sectarian violence in the country, with the additional risk of spreading it to neighbouring countries. We are also deeply concerned about the emergence of groups within the armed opposition that do not conceal their association with terrorist organizations. We believe that those organizations should not be allowed to take advantage of the existing instability.

We acknowledge the efforts made and the work done to place the various opposition groups in Syria under the same banner, which has so far resulted in the creation of the so-called Syrian National Coalition. However, we remain concerned that the label of "legitimate representative of the Syrian people" is being assigned to the Coalition. Guatemala believes that any transition in Syria should be the product of a Syrian-led process that respects the rights of all parties, and that it is premature to legitimize a group that, like the Government, may not enjoy the broad support of the Syrian population, much less has not been elected democratically. We hope that the function of that group is focused on facilitating interlocutors to advance peaceful negotiations between the parties. On that point, it should be clear that the perpetrators of all crimes committed in Syria, whoever they may be, should be held accountable for their actions. Atrocities of the magnitude of those that have occurred in Syria must not go unpunished.

In addition, Guatemala recognizes the urgent need for the implementation of the humanitarian response plan in Syria. It is unacceptable for the suffering of the Syrian people to continue. In that regard, although we have welcomed the pledges that have been made in the various meetings of donor countries, we believe that it is important that they be made effective. In the same context, it is also indispensable to help all countries that provide humanitarian aid and receive Syrian refugees. The impact that the conflict has had within their borders is quickly consuming those resources, thereby also putting them at risk.

Turning now to the Middle East peace process, including the Palestinian question, we hope that in the short term both Israel and Palestine can commit themselves to the peace process and work to advance a solution that will lead to a long and lasting peace. In that regard, on 8 April my Government took the decision to recognize Palestine as a State. That decision, based on the principle of the right to self-determination, was made while taking into account the importance of relaunching direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine with the support of the international community and leading to the adoption of a definitive agreement that would allow both parties to live in peace within clearly defined, secure and internationally recognized borders, and that would ensure peaceful coexistence between the two peoples. We hope that the Quartet will resume playing a proactive role in that regard.

Above all, we hope that the parties directly involved will assume the responsibility of working to find viable solutions in the short term. The year 2013 should be marked by the long-delayed resumption of substantive negotiations that will lead to a definitive agreement to resolve all outstanding issues and demands. In that

regard, we believe that the work done by the United States in recent weeks may help steer the process and give the parties the necessary push to launch much-needed dialogue.

Furthermore, we are concerned with respect to the poor state of the Palestinian economy and its negative impact on efforts to build State institutions. We believe it necessary for the international community to reaffirm its support for the Palestinian Authority and encourage countries of the region and emerging economies to fully extend their assistance for the revitalization of the Palestinian economy.

The international community should urge both sides to avoid any act, action or provocation that would hinder the possibility of returning to the negotiating table. We believe that the international community, through the United Nations, is obliged to condemn all violations committed, including those related to safety, and take all necessary actions to put an end to those transgressions. The parties cannot be expected to act responsibly if condemnation for their actions is not forthcoming.

Finally, my delegation believes that it is only through respect for the rights of each of those peoples and a firm commitment to a peaceful solution that both parties will be able to live together in peace, within secure and recognized borders.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like at the outset to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing and for his reflections. I wish also to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, who was here with us in the Chamber until just a few minutes ago, and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their statements.

There is broad agreement among the international community on the fact that the coming months will be decisive in terms of reviving the peace process between Israel and Palestine. There is also a general and shared acknowledgment of the fact that lack of progress or a fresh failure in this undertaking could seriously harm the two-State solution. There is no doubt that the current window of opportunity noted by Mr. Feltman to attain the two-State solution cannot withstand further delay. Time is pressing, and the moment is now. It is urgent because it is possible. The international community believes that it will be possible to breathe new life into the peace process.

We know, however, that the situation on the ground continues to present immense challenges, both long-standing and new. In spite of the repeated calls made by the international community, there are no signs that Israel plans to modify or curb its current settlement policy, which is a real, concrete and tangible obstacle in the way of peace. Nor does it appear that there is to be a just and favourable solution to the problem of Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli custody, which has recently intensified.

In that context, resolving the case of Samer Issawi is pivotal in order to preserve stability in the West Bank. We therefore welcomed the news of a legal decision indicating that Mr. Issawi will now be able to exercise his right of return to Jerusalem in order to complete his sentence there and end his hunger strike.

In addition, the rocket attacks targeting Israeli territory that have occurred in recent weeks deserve to be roundly condemned and demonstrate the fragility of the ceasefire reached last November. In that context, a number of positive signs allow us to believe, with cautious optimism, that there exist real possibilities of overcoming the current impasse. We would like also to acknowledge President Obama's recent trip to the region as well as the rapid follow-up visits paid by Secretary of State Kerry, which undoubtedly are significant events in that regard.

We know that the success of these new undertakings will hinge largely on the extent to which this renewed commitment leads to a credible and comprehensive proposal for the resumption of talks, which must include the actors in the region and beyond who have declared their intention to move forward in a coordinated manner. We believe also that the Security Council can play an important and constructive role in that regard by reaffirming the framework for the peace process and ensuring that the parties do not engage in blameworthy or unlawful conduct, which would exacerbate the situation and undermine mutual trust.

We also welcome the announcement of plans to promote economic and social development in Palestine and all measures aimed at promoting institution-building and the fiscal sustainability of the Palestinian Authority. However, Argentina is convinced, and knows from experience, that the economy, economic development and social cohesion as objectives — not only in the case of Palestine but anywhere in the world — are not separate or independent from political decisions.

That is why the long-term strengthening of the economy and of social cohesion as well as the consolidation of Palestinian institutions will be possible only if there is a political horizon in place for ending the occupation.

Furthermore, the alleviation of the humanitarian situation — in addition to being a legal, social and political imperative — must also be central to actions aimed at creating a favourable environment for the resumption of the talks. In Gaza in particular, is a well-established fact that the extension of fishing limits to 12 nautical miles would have a significant and beneficial impact on the living conditions of more than 3,000 families that depend on fishery resources, and that the lifting of restrictions on the entry of building materials and on the entry and egress of goods would lead to an immediate improvement in the situation of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Those are measures that can and should be taken quickly and in full and must not be delayed, undermined or ignored.

Finally, we welcome the fact that the registration of Palestinian voters has been completed. That is a significant technical step on the road towards establishing a unity Government, and we are also aware that substantial problems remain to be resolved in order to progress towards the necessary reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, in the context of the commitments made by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Finding a rapid solution to the Syrian crisis appears to be an increasingly complex, controversial and difficult process. The signs of openness to dialogue that were noted some three months ago did not develop sufficiently. Indeed, the serious incidents that have occurred in recent weeks on the border between Lebanon and Syria and the allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons suggest that the conflict continues its downward spiral of violence and has now entered a stage that is cause for the utmost concern.

We reiterate our conviction that the only possible solution to the crisis is a political one. In spite of that, rather than witnessing coordinated efforts on the part of those with influence on the parties aimed at convincing them to take a place at the negotiating table, we continue daily to receive reports of the increased military assistance that external actors continue to provide to both sides, thereby enabling them to continue with their mutual destruction and that of the rest of the country.

The continued provision of weapons to both sides in this dispute has been instrumental to the escalating militarization of the conflict. I recall that Argentina urged the Council in January to adopt appropriate and just measures aimed at putting an end to the uninterrupted supply of arms and the subsequent spiral of violence.

The fact that the Security Council was able, a few days ago, to speak unanimously on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.6949) shows not only that we can end the status quo of intolerable silence, but also that the solution in Syria is and must be a political one. Similarly, the Security Council must overcome its differences, which is not only a political decision but also a moral duty.

We have made clear that we support and fully endorse the principles outlined by Special Representative Brahimi. We did so not only last January but also reaffirmed that view only a few days ago, both our confidence in Joint Special Representative Brahimi and the criteria of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). I hope that that will not be a mere mechanical or rhetorical repetition, but a decision by us as a Council to contribute to a political solution for our brothers and sisters in Syria through a frank and inclusive dialogue, which our fellow delegations must not impede, hamper or prevent from taking place.

Finally, with regard to Lebanon, we certainly remain concerned at the impact of the Syrian crisis on that country. As High Commissioner Guterres said in this Chamber, the crisis has become an existential threat to the survival of many and to the future prospects of others in Lebanon. We support once again the policy of disassociation adopted by the Government of Lebanon and reiterate how important it is that all political sectors in Lebanon respect that policy as a key element for preserving the stability of the country.

Despite the change and upheaval rippling across the Middle East, we must not lose sight of the central importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in our deliberations on peace in the region. Peace and security in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, have been on the agenda of the United Nations almost since the very inception of the Organization. Time, hope, resources and efforts of all kinds have been devoted, at best, to providing a space to manage the crisis, but not to resolving it.

In that regard, we have a normative framework with the criteria and principles for a lasting solution, which enjoy broad international acceptance. Together we must continue to consider what our shortcomings have been and how we can implement that framework for the benefit not only of the parties, Palestine and Israel, but also the region and the world.

We hope that the strong support of the international community for the two-State solution will give rise to concrete efforts on the part of both sides, and of relevant international actors, aimed at relaunching the peace process without delay and at creating an environment conducive to the resumption of direct negotiations in order to attain a comprehensive solution based on a vision of the region whereby the two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side, within secure and recognized borders. Argentina will continue to actively support all initiatives towards that end.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

My country will take the opportunity provided by this debate to address the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the situations in Syria and Lebanon.

Today's consideration of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, offers yet another occasion to my delegation not only to express its profound concern at the ongoing events in the region, but also to draw the attention of the international community, and especially the Security Council, to the urgent need to work to urge all parties to overcome the obstacles blocking the path to peace and security in the region.

It is indeed time for the Palestinian and Israeli parties to decide to genuinely embrace rapprochement. We believe that the status quo has gone on for too long and that the two parties should resolve to make good on their commitments to achieve a negotiated solution for the creation of two States, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Israel and the Palestinian Authority must now take steps to strengthen mutual trust.

In that regard, we welcome the reopening on 19 April of the Kerem Shalom crossing, reserved for goods and the humanitarian aid delivery to the Gaza Strip. We urge the Israeli authorities to do more by raising the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. We also urge them to release Palestinian prisoners and detainees who have not been charged but are still currently in Israeli prisons. We also believe that the time has come to end the expansion of settlements.

At the same time, we once again urge Hamas to take all steps possible to control the armed groups that refuse to renounce violence and whose acts undermine the trust that otherwise could have been strengthened between that movement and Israel since the ceasefire agreement was signed in November 2012.

The issue of Palestinian refugees living in camps remains a source of major concern for my country. The United Nations is making enormous efforts to assist those thousands of persons through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). That is why my country condemns the attacks aimed at the UNRWA office site by the demonstrators in Gaza on 4 April. We believe that nothing could justify such acts of violence against humanitarian personnel and United Nations installations trying to assist refugees. The authorities in Gaza should provide the guarantees needed to allow the Office to continue its operations peacefully and free of impediments.

It cannot be overemphasized that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the two parties. Those negotiations, interrupted now almost three years ago, must absolutely be resumed. In that regard, Togo would like to call on the international community, and more specifically on the Security Council and the Quartet, to exert pressure of all kinds on the two parties to agree on a renewed timeline for the resumption of negotiations. We are convinced that dialogue is the only way to a lasting settlement of the conflict.

In this regard, my country reaffirms the call it issued at the debate in January (see S/PV.6906) for the reactivation of the Arab Peace Plan, the Madrid principles and the road map, with the support of the States Members of the United Nations that have any influence with either party. We therefore welcome the recent decision of the Arab League to resume work to revive the peace process. The creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State, living alongside Israel in peace and security within recognized borders, remains the goal that all our efforts should contribute

to achieve. In that respect, we welcome and support all initiatives, in particular those recently undertaken by the United States of America, that could contribute to that objective.

In Syria, the prevailing political and military situation has plunged the international community into growing uncertainty about a future solution to the crisis. The destruction of the country's infrastructure, the unbridled pursuit of killings, massive violations of human rights, and the mass movement of displaced persons and refugees lead us to believe that the country is self-destructing even as the whole world watches without being able to act to end this tragedy. Given such a state of affairs, an end to the war is indubitably the solution.

In this respect, Togo welcomes the Security Council's 18 April call on the parties to end the violence in all its forms and to start negotiations for a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). The Security Council must build on the unity it attained on 18 April 18 to compel the parties to sign a ceasefire that would open the way to the national dialogue that alone can end the conflict.

With respect to Lebanon, my country is concerned not only about the ongoing insecurity on its border with Syria, but also and especially by the scale of its humanitarian needs. Beyond the security implications of the Syrian war, which has been manifest in clashes between factions and supporters of each party to the conflict, which my country condemns, the issue of Syrian refugees, who are estimated at more than 1.2 million and whose numbers are increasing every day, fuels our concerns. Indeed, the burden of these refugees is felt at all levels of life in Lebanon, and it is to be feared that this situation may jeopardize peace and stability in that country.

Togo again calls on the international community and donor countries to further support the Lebanese Government in addressing both the humanitarian needs of the refugees and the growing insecurity in the host cities. We reiterate our warm thanks to the donor countries for the efforts they have undertaken to that end.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his detailed briefing. Entering the second quarter of the year, the Middle East peace process seems to be at the fork of two diverging roads. There must have been a road not taken much fairer than the one Israel and Palestine have taken thus far. The choice both sides make today will make all the difference. Recently, we have witnessed a faint glimmer of hope that allows for cautious optimism, but there also exist disappointing elements. Israel and Palestine should deal with the unforeseen incidents occurring on a daily basis. No matter how serious these incidents are, however, both parties should maintain the farsighted perspective of a negotiated resolution of all issues.

Following the death of a Palestinian detainee on 2 April, protests broke out, and during the clashes two young Palestinians died. This is an unfortunate vicious cycle that needs to be broken. My delegation condemns the rocket attacks from Gaza. Both parties must abide by the ceasefire agreed to in November. In this regard, we commend the government of Israel for reopening the Kerem Shalom crossing.

The continuing plight of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip is unacceptable; at the same time, cannot justify hostility towards humanitarian facilities and staff. The violent acts of protestors against a United Nations food distribution centre are deplorable. The safety and security of United Nations humanitarian property and staff must be guaranteed regardless of the situation.

In terms of the long-term perspective, my delegation takes note of three particular developments. First, it is encouraging that the United States Government is making efforts to engage both sides, as well as neighbouring countries, through President Obama's and Secretary Kerry's visits to the region. We expect that this shuttle diplomacy will lead to an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine. We welcome the reported agreement to seek ways to assist the economic development of Palestine. Meaningful progress on the economic track will, we hope, create positive momentum in breaking the political stalemate.

Secondly, my delegation is concerned that Israel's demolition activity has recently resumed in Area C. We urge the Government of Israel to forego further construction of settlements. We welcome the agreement between Israel and Palestine regarding UNESCO's activity in the Old City of Jerusalem. We hope that this small progress will lead to a more meaningful trust-building going forward.

Thirdly, the resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority has overshadowed uncertainties on the future of the Palestinian Authority,

reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and the prospects of the peace process. My delegation hopes that, under the leadership of President Abbas, a capable successor will be appointed soon.

In order for all these variables to converge on the common goal of lasting peace and security in the Middle East, it is imperative that both Israel and Palestine refrain from initiating provocative acts and demonstrate a spirit of compromise. We hope that the Quartet will resume its work and, combined with the mediation efforts of the United States, have a synergic effect.

The situation in Lebanon requires our continued attention. The resignation of Prime Minister Mikati could increase the unpredictability of the domestic political scene. With the Syrian crisis at its doorstep, the Government's dissociation policy needs to be observed by all parties in order to prevent the inflammation of sectarian tensions within Lebanon. The influx of refugees has increased Lebanon's population by more than 10 per cent. With the Syrian crisis on the verge of spilling across its borders, all political players should unite to secure Lebanon's political sovereignty and territorial integrity at this critical juncture.

The civil war in Syria is by far the most dangerous crisis in terms of the scale of its casualties and the scope of its impact. The crisis has entered its third year, resulting in well over 70,000 deaths, 4.5 million internally displaced persons and 1.3 million refugees. Last week, five United Nations humanitarian agency heads made a joint statement warning that the humanitarian response has reached the limits of its capacity. Their statements demonstrated the urgency of a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Particularly heartbreaking is the suffering of the most vulnerable groups, especially women and children. The international community should continue to attend to their suffering and provide support. The Republic of Korea believes that all perpetrators of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law must be held accountable. My delegation urges the parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and embark upon efforts towards a political solution. We also invite countries that have not yet done so to provide their support for referring the case to the International Criminal Court.

It is imperative that the international community rally to support the Syrian people. Their ongoing plight foreshadows a bleak future for the entire nation. Therefore, it is also important to prepare for a future reconstruction process in Syria. In that regard, I wish to inform the Council that the Government of the Republic of Korea is planning in June to host the third meeting of the working group on economic recovery and development of the Group of Friends of Syria. To that end, we are now consulting with Germany and the United Arab Emirates, the co-chairs of the working group.

It is with a heavy heart that I must accept that the situation in Syria has not improved since the Security Council held its open debate three months ago (see S/PV.6906). On the contrary, it has begun to deteriorate on an exponential scale. As members of the Security Council, we share a heavy sense of responsibility. I hope that the Council will break the current deadlock and make a meaningful contribution to the resolution of that tragic conflict.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing. I have also listened carefully to the statements made by the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

The core and root causes of the Middle East questions remain the Palestinian issue, to which dialogue and negotiation represent the only viable solution. China is concerned about the long-term stagnation of the peace talks. Recently, the international community has stepped up efforts to promote peace, and both parties have expressed their willingness to resume peace talks. China welcomes those developments and hopes that both sides will seize opportunities, overcome obstacles, bridge their differences, take measures to build mutual trust and restart negotiations as soon as possible.

China is open to all initiatives conducive to bridging the differences between the two parties and restarting dialogue and negotiations. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo accords, and we hope that it will not be another futile year for the peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

Israeli settlement activities are the direct cause of the stagnation of the peace talks and the major obstacle to their resumption. Israel should take the initiative by ending its settlement activities in the occupied territories and addressing the issue of Palestinian detainees in order to create the necessary conditions for

the restoration of mutual trust and an early resumption of the peace talks.

Currently, the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, remains grave. The relevant United Nations resolutions must be effectively implemented, and we hope that Israel will lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip as soon as possible and alleviate the humanitarian situation there. We call on the Quartet to take concrete measures to promote the resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel, while the Security Council also needs to play a bigger role in promoting a settlement of the issue.

China continues to believe that Palestine and Israel should settle their disputes through political dialogue, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East road map. The ultimate goal is to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders and living side by side with Israel in peace.

China firmly supports the just cause of the Palestinians for the restoration of their legitimate national rights, and has been promoting the peace talks through its own means. The Chinese special envoy on the Middle East issue, Mr. Wu Sike, will visit Palestine and Israel from 25 to 30 April to exchange views with both sides on the latest developments in the peace process in the Middle East and to carry out peace facilitation work.

China stands ready to work with the international community to play a constructive role for the early realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A political solution is the only viable way to resolve the Syrian issue. Currently, the Syrian issue is at a critical stage. We urge the parties concerned in Syria, on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/523, annex), to achieve a ceasefire and end hostilities as soon as possible, launch a political dialogue and implement a Syrian-led political transition process. The international community should also step up mediation efforts in order to play a positive and constructive role in the just, peaceful and proper settlement of the Syrian issue.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Rwanda.

I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his informative and insightful briefing on the current situation in the Middle East. I also thank Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, and Mr. Ron Prosor, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, for joining us today.

In the Security Council, we hold an open debate every quarter to examine the progress made and the bottlenecks in moving forward, and to keep track of the Middle East peace process. We last gathered here on 23 January (see S/PV.6906) to examine the stalemate in the Middle East peace process, and specifically in the implementation of the two-State solution. Today, we have come here to review what we have achieved or not, and the way forward.

A sustainable solution for the Middle East peace process must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should play their role in complete commitment to those objectives and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Our role in the Council is to make sure that deliberations and decisions are translated into action.

On 20 March, President Obama visited Israel and Palestine. That was a positive step in the revival of the Middle East peace process. It is on that note that we express our appreciation to the Government of the United States for that initiative, and we hope that the effort will bear concrete results. We further commend President Obama's efforts for the reconciliation of Turkey and Israel. Israeli/Turkish reconciliation could improve regional coordination in the Middle East peace process and prevent the crisis of the Syrian civil war from spreading.

Rwanda, like the African Union, is of the view that a two-State solution is the only viable resolution for both nations. That involves the creation of a Palestinian State that is independent and sovereign, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. We therefore encourage both sides to support and implement confidence-building measures that will allow the peace process to move forward. Any action that may undermine the two-State solution should be avoided. We reiterate our view that Israel should be

fully recognized by its regional partners and should live in security within its borders. At the same time, the Palestinians' aspiration to have their own State that is political independent and economically viable must be fulfilled.

We urge all parties to consolidate the ceasefire in Gaza that was brokered by the Egyptian President, Mohamed Morsy. Rwanda expresses its concern over the deteriorating security in the West Bank. We call on all sides to avoid public statements that could further fuel the tensions.

We continue to support the Quartet in its mediation efforts, but deplore the current diplomatic impasse. We therefore call on the Quartet and those countries that have influence on both parties to redouble their efforts to bring to the table new initiatives for peace in the Middle East.

Turning to Syria, let me clearly state that the situation is unbearable. The humanitarian situation is worsening day by day with the deaths of thousands of people, with refugee numbers reaching over 1 million and with over 3 million internally displaced persons. This is a stain on the world's conscience. The international community has the duty to address the situation. Mr. Brahimi reminded the Council that it is the last court of appeal when international peace is at risk, and it is time to translate our deliberations and decisions into actions.

Based on the recent report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and mass destruction have been committed. There are reported accounts of murder, arbitrary detentions, sexual violence and torture committed by the parties involved, and now we have heard allegations of the possible use of chemical weapons.

As a member of the Security Council, Rwanda will work with our colleagues to encourage a strong and unified response to bring about a process of political transition in Syria. Military intervention in Syria will only continue to exacerbate the killing and violence and the emergence of Al-Qaida. In that context, we continue to support the work of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his efforts to bring a political solution to the conflict. And we believe that the Arab League should indeed assume a role in that solution.

In seeking to prevent the escalation of the Syrian conflict into neighbouring countries, we hope that Lebanon will soon be able to control its borders in order to avert clashes between the Syrian rebels and the Hizbullah militants, which put civilians' lives at risk in border areas. We also call upon the Lebanese Government to take action against Hizbullah's aggressions and to do everything within its means to ensure the safety of civilians on the Lebanese-Syrian border.

In conclusion, the stalemate in the Middle East is not impossible to resolve, but we need realistic solutions based on international principles and norms. That will require all influential stakeholders to display strong political will by considering and reinforcing the needs of the peoples and nations of the region. It goes without saying that the Security Council must play its intended role by fulfilling its mandate to seek and enforce a sustainable solution to the conflicts in the Middle East as far as returning credibility. We therefore call on everyone to take responsibility.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

There are still a number of speakers remaining inscribed on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.6950 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6950th meeting
Wednesday, 24 April 2013, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nduhungirehe	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Rutilo
	Australia	Mr. White
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Sharifov
	China	Mr. Zhu Yanwei
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Guatemala	Ms. Bolaños Pérez
	Luxembourg	Mr. Flies
	Morocco	Mr. Erroja
	Pakistan	Mr. Munir
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Lee Kyung Chul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Listov
	Togo	Mr. Akpoto Komlagan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Day
	United States of America	Mr. Cenzer

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-31190 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Cuba, Ecuador and Indonesia to participate in this meeting.

I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the briefing he gave us this morning.

I would like to make the following three comments. First, the Lebanese Government affirms today, as it always does, its respect for its obligations under international resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006). On numerous occasions, the Lebanese Government has called for the implementation of all the provisions of that resolution. By the same token, it has often called upon the international community to urge Israel to fulfil its obligations and to end its violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air, also in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

It is undeniable that the current calm in southern Lebanon reflects my country's commitment to those obligations and the cooperation between the Lebanese Army and the forces of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). In that regard, we pay tribute to UNIFIL's contribution through its command and its troops. Nonetheless, efforts must be strengthened to move from a cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire.

It should also be underscored that the Israeli air force violates Lebanese airspace on a daily basis, as underscored by the Secretary-General in his periodic report (see S/2013/120). That is a threat to the safety of civilians and is also likely to undermine UNIFIL's mission. In that connection, must I recall that Israel continues to occupy the northern part of Al-Ghajar village and neighbouring regions? That is a gross violation of its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) and disregards the plan put forward by UNIFIL to bring an end to the occupation. Today we reiterate our call for an end to Israeli occupation of the northern part of the Al-Ghajar village, the Shab'a farms and the Kfar Shuba hills.

Secondly, since our meeting on 18 April on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.6949), the situation in that country has worsened further, as has its impact on neighbouring countries, in particular on my country, Lebanon, at all social, economic and security levels. I would therefore like to state that Lebanon is committed, now more than ever, to a policy of dissociation from the crisis in Syria. It is committed to the tenets of the Baabda Declaration, adopted by the National Dialogue Committee in June 2012.

This morning His Excellency, Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of the Republic, reiterated his position that Lebanon will not allow weapons or combatants to be sent to Syria or training camps to be set up in Lebanon. In that regard, he underscored that this position is not only in accordance with the implementation of the Baabda Declaration and the policy of non-interference in Syrian affairs, but also helps to consolidate Syrian national unity and avoids destabilizing the situation.

However, the military impact of the fighting in Syria continues to spread to the border areas with Lebanon and constitutes a gross violation of my country's security. In that connection, we again condemn those who order such violations, whatever their justification may be.

Furthermore, the ongoing influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon is constantly increasing. The number of refugees has increased by 20,000 during the past week, while resources are noticeably decreasing. We are no longer able to meet the basic needs of refugees for housing, food and medicine. Nonetheless, we reiterate that the borders of Lebanon will remain open to Syrian refugees and that Lebanon has no intention to deport anyone. At the same time, we reaffirm our support for the two requests made by the the President of the Republic of Lebanon for the convening of an international conference on Syrian refugees in order to consider ways to share the burden, based on the principal of a shared responsibility, and to establish camps within Syria far from the confrontation zones and close to neighbouring States, under the protection of the United Nations.

Thirdly, returning the to the main topic of today's debate, all reports underscore the fact that Israel is

pursuing its settlement activities in the occupied territories with impunity and in violation of United Nations resolutions, and continues to build the separation wall in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Similarly, it continues to confiscate lands and take control of water sources in contravention of the provisions of conventions signed in Geneva and The Hague.

However, a new factor that is actually both new and old is the worsening of the difficulties experienced by prisoners in Israeli detention. As the Council is aware, since it began its occupation in 1967, Israel has detained over 726,000 Palestinians and left many to rot in prison without trial. Since the beginning of this year, Israel has arrested more than 1,070 Palestinians. Of those, 234 are children, some of whom are only eight years old. Samer Issawi and his companions have continued their hunger strike and their heroic resistance month after month in order to ensure that the cause of Palestinian prisoners is publicized in the international media. Indeed, their cause has been taken up by numerous humanitarian human rights organizations. The conditions that led to the deaths of the two prisoners, including Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh, has shaken international public opinion. However, the Security Council has remained silent in the face of that unacceptable humanitarian tragedy.

In the same context, I should now like to focus on the issue of children in the Israeli military detention system, in particular following the publication of a report on that subject by UNICEF on 6 March. The report documents the most abject, arbitrary, institutional types of maltreatment — including torture, blows and humiliation — inflicted upon Palestinian children when they are stopped or transferred to be interrogated. Those practices include, inter alia, raids into houses and arrests in the middle of the night. They are detained alone, threatened with rape and are not allowed to have their family members present with them. In the report on the subject, UNICEF calls for all measures to be taken to ensure appropriate treatment of Palestinian children who are arrested by the Israeli authorities, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other national instruments.

We are not living on another planet. We are fully aware of the political reasons for this situation, even if we do not approve of the political reasons that have prevented the Council from assuming its responsibilities and bringing an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian State and the realization of its independence. But what is stopping the Council from at least adopting a statement to reflect UNICEF's recommendations, based on the most basic humanitarian standards? How can the Council remain silent?

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have carefully listened to today's briefing by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. My delegation supports the comprehensive statements to be delivered this afternoon by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Djibouti on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Allow me to add the following observations.

Egypt underscores that Palestine's accession to non-member observer State status in the United Nations pursuant to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012 is a first step towards full membership of the State of Palestine at the United Nations on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967. We call on the Security Council to respond as soon as possible to the request from the State of Palestine dated 23 September 2011 for full membership at the United Nations (S/2011/592, annex I).

Egypt condemns the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular around East Jerusalem. We call on the international community to take a firm stand against those illegal practices.

Egypt condemns the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people on occupied land, including its siege of the Gaza Strip and pressure on the Palestinian Authority, as well as Israeli settlers continuing to resort to violence against unarmed Palestinians. We call on the international community to work towards an immediate release of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees held in Israeli detention centres. We condemn the flagrant violations against them, including the deaths of the two prisoners Arafat Jaradat and Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh. We also pay tribute to the struggle of the prisoner Samer Issawi. We hold Israel fully responsible for protecting his life and call for his return to the West Bank.

The Quartet mechanism must be reviewed. The group has made no progress in the past few years, to the point that it cannot even agree on whether to meet.

Egypt supports the recent efforts of the United States of America to resume working for peace following the visit of President Obama to the region. We hope that those efforts will lead to genuine progress this year that moves the Palestinian question forward towards the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. We welcome the easing of the fiscal restrictions imposed on financial support to the Palestinian side and look forward to Israel lifting all financial sanctions.

Egypt is working for stability in the Gaza Strip. We continue our efforts towards national reconciliation, which certainly merits the clear support of the international community and the parties concerned, not the imposition of obstacles. We express our concern about Israel's continuing defiance of all attempts to calm the situation, including its ongoing aggression against Palestinians and the strengthening of the economic embargo on the Gaza Strip, as well as the restrictions on areas to Palestinian fishermen.

We believe that Egypt's efforts to preserve maintain stability on the Sinai peninsula, including through security cooperation with all parties, have led to the investigation of undocumented media reports of two missiles recently being launched against Israel. To date, we have no specific evidence of the truth of such allegations.

Israel continues to call for an immediate end to acts of violence and bloodshed in Syria by providing urgent assistance to the Syrian refugees and support to the host countries of those refugees. We underscore the need to maintain the unit and territorial integrity of Syrian land and the cohesion of Syrian society. The events taking place in Syria today in no way justify the continuing occupation of the Syrian Golan. We call for the immediate implementation of relevant resolutions regarding the legitimacy of the occupation of the Golan. We call for no settlements in the Golan and Israel's withdrawal from the territory.

In the light of what I have just said, Egypt again calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities in order to deal with the Palestinian question with the seriousness that it requires. We further urge the Council to take the necessary measures to put an immediate end to the illegal Israeli settlement activities towards an ultimate solution, in particular since the question of Palestine has been and continues to be the fundamental reason for instability in the Middle East, thereby threatening international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Fathalla (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Security Council for giving me the floor on behalf of the League of Arab States at the first meeting and briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, since the summit meeting of the League of Arab States held at the end of March. The importance of today's meeting lies in the fact that it represents a further link in the communication and contact between the Security Council and the League of Arab States following the Council meeting attended by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States on 26 September 2012 (see S/PV.6841). That meeting led to the adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2012/20) reaffirming the cooperation between the League of Arab States and the United Nations in the area of international peace and security.

I will therefore focus my statement on the contents of the decisions of the recent Arab summit and the statement of the Secretary General of the League of Arab States on the question of Palestine and the developing situation in Syria.

The summit meeting of the League of Arab States adopted resolution 7595, which reaffirms that a just and comprehensive peace is our strategic option. The resolution underscores the fact that the peace process is a comprehensive and indivisible course of action and that a just and comprehensive peace in the region can be achieved only through a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, to the lines of 24 June 1967, and the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon.

The resolution reaffirms the need to achieve a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, General Assembly resolution 194 (III), the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the condemnation of all forms of settlement, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the 2002 Beirut summit and the subsequent summit meetings of the League of Arab States, as well as international law and the relevant terms of reference. The resolution reaffirms that

Palestine is a full partner in the peace process. It calls for continued support for Palestine in its just demand that Israel cease all settlement activities. It further calls for negotiations to be based on the terms of reference of the peace process, namely, the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace, and within a specific time frame. It urges that the borders be discussed on the basis of an end to the occupation since 1967 and that the final status issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular the settlement of the questions of Jerusalem, refugees, borders, land, water rights and Israel's full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, start to be addressed.

The resolution underscores the fact that the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are a single and indivisible geographic entity, on which, together with all territories occupied since 1967, the independent State of Palestine is to be established, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It also condemns all Israeli efforts to divide the unity of the Palestinian territories, as well as all unilateral measures by Israel.

Since the historic adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 67/19 granting observer status at the United Nations to the State of Palestine, the peace process has been in a stalemate as a result of Israeli settlement activities. The stalemate has led regional and international partners to express concern about the threat it poses to the peace process. Israel's intransigent and continued expansion of settlements in the face of the clear international consensus on their illegality and illegitimacy, their violation of the norms and rules of international law and humanitarian law, and the grave harm they do to the peace process and the achievement of the two-State solution also led the Arab summit to hold Israel wholly responsible for the delays in negotiations.

In that context, the Arab summit called upon the international community to launch serious discussions whose terms of reference should be the implementation of United Nations resolutions, in particular relevant Security Council resolutions — primarily resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — calling for an end to the occupation and an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, an end to the occupation of the territories of the State of Palestine, and the release of Arab and Palestinian prisoners. The summit also called upon the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and adopt the necessary mechanisms to achieve those ends.

In that context, I note the conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union on 10 December 2012, which emphasized the urgency of renewed, structured and substantial peace efforts in 2013, as well as the report of the Secretary-General of 8 March 2013, which states that "[t]he year 2013 will be decisive in the peace process" (*A/67/738, para. 25*). The Secretary-General's report also reiterates the five priorities he set forth in that regard in his address to the General Assembly on 22 January 2013, primary among which was the importance of renewing a collective international engagement, which was further emphasized in the Caracas Declaration in Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the State of Palestine of 18 April 2013.

Of course, the commitment of the Security Council, as the United Nations body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, should be in the forefront of that collective international engagement. Further, on 23 January, the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations stated that the United States is still fully committed to direct negotiations, which lends further significance to the forthcoming visit to Washington , D.C., next week by the Arab ministerial delegation following this week's consultations with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States and visits to a number of European States that have taken place since the Arab summit in March.

Moving on to the situation in Syria, the most important development in the context of the Arab League was the adoption of resolution 580 by the Arab summit on 26 March. I will describe some of the resolution's content without getting into too much detail.

First, the resolution welcomes the fact that the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces would now be occupying the seat formerly held by the Syrian Arab Republic in the League of Arab States, its bodies, councils and organizations, until the holding of elections leading to the formation of a Government that can assume authority in Syria.

Secondly, the resolution emphasizes the importance of efforts to reach a political solution in the Syrian crisis as a priority, and the right of States to their own self-defence.

Thirdly, the resolution commends the efforts of neighbouring States and other Arab States in providing for the urgent needs of refugees and calls for support to help those States shoulder the burden of hosting refugees in terms of housing and other assistance, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, in accordance with the relief plans put forth by their respective Governments.

Fourthly, the resolution calls for an international conference at the United Nations for the reconstruction of Syria and the rehabilitation of infrastructure in all affected sectors as a result of the widespread destruction. In that regard, I also note the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States held a meeting a Geneva last week with the High Commissioner for Refugees to address all aspects of the crisis, including renewed cooperation between the League of Arab States and Office of the High Commissioner.

In order to reaffirm the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States to achieve stability, security and good governance in Syria under a democratic system, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States held a number of meetings at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York on 22 April, the first of which was with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Also in attendance was Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, who chairs the committee formed by the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States on the crisis in Syria, where a consensus was reached on expressing greater concern about the deteriorating situation in Syria than it has at any other time in the past, taking note of the effects of the crisis on the region, and stating that there is no viable solution to the crisis other than a political solution.

The tripartite talks between the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi were held the same day, 22 April, in the course of which they considered ways and means to assist the various Syrian parties in launching a transitional political process aimed at creating a new Syria where the entire population and all factions would enjoy protection. In that meeting, Mr. Ban called upon the Security Council to come together and exert all its efforts to achieve a political solution. He also expressed his support for the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi for that purpose, a call which was seconded by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States. We make the same appeal to the Security Council today. Undoubtedly, in the end, all those efforts will lead to the implementation of the Geneva Communiqué which can be modified to take into account developments that have taken place since its adoption.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep gratitude for the contacts between the Security Council and the League of Arab States in conformity with the agreement reached last September.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I speak on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

At the outset, Mr. President, I hasten to congratulate your country most sincerely, as well as you and your team, upon Rwanda's rejoining the Security Council almost 20 years after the genocide. It is a remarkable achievement, and we salute the people of Rwanda and wish them continued full enjoyment of peace and stability.

The current status quo of political stalemate remains the most pressing concern and long-standing challenge to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the international community. Despite the promising reality following the granting of observer State status to Palestine by an overwhelming majority of States members of the General Assembly on 29 November 2012 (see A/67/PV.44), the OIC believes that the implications arising from the significant missed opportunities we have seen are definitely unfavourable, especially in the light of the highly unstable and volatile situation in the Middle East.

Despite the support granted by the majority of States Members of the United Nations to resolution 67/19 elevating Palestine to the status of observer State, Israel, the occupying Power, persists in carrying out illegal policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, by expanding settlements, building an apartheid wall, detaining thousands of Palestinians and illegally besieging the Gaza Strip. All these activities now threaten to undermine the prospects for the two-State solution and to destabilize the region. In that regard, the OIC calls upon the international community to ensure Israel's halt of its settlement policies and enable the Palestinian people

to exercise their inalienable rights, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law.

The detention of Palestinians is very alarming. That miserable and hopeless scenario is repeating itself, against the backdrop of pervasive Israeli repressive and inhumane measures, and shows no sign of ending. The resort by Palestinians to refusing food can be seen as a rejection of the widespread harsh and injurious Israeli instrument known as administrative detention, which is administered by military courts, so as to detain Palestinians indefinitely, subject to half-yearly reviews.

At this critical time, the OIC underlines that prompt action aimed at upholding the principles of right, justice and freedom; the enforcement of international law; and the implementation of resolutions of international legality constitutes an obligation and a responsibility of the Security Council. Such action is necessary in order to maintain the prospects for peace and to accelerate its realization through fulfilling the Palestinian people's national rights to self-determination and independence; finding an equitable settlement for Palestinian refugees based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III); resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict; and, ultimately, achieving a durable peace in the region that will lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The OIC remains very concerned over the human rights violations committed against Palestinians in Israeli prisons. The death of the Palestinian prisoner Maysara Abu Hamdieh last month in an Israeli jail not only exposes the inhumane policies and systematic violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian prisoners, but also requires the international community to take urgent and effective action in order to defend Palestinian prisoners' human rights, save their lives and pressure Israel to respect its obligations towards Palestinian prisoners in accordance with international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions, and to release them immediately.

The OIC underlines that the blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip constitutes a collective punishment of the civilian population; has a serious social, economic and humanitarian impact on the living conditions of the Palestinian population; and represents a serious threat to regional peace and stability. In that regard, the OIC reiterates its firm and unwavering demand for an immediate end to the illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade and the opening of all crossing points controlled by Israel, to allow for the free movement of persons and goods into and from the Gaza Strip.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation is very concerned over the deteriorating situation and the ongoing bloodshed, violence and destruction of property in Syria, and it stresses the need to preserve Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The OIC therefore calls for the immediate cessation of the violence, killing and destruction, for the respect of Islamic values and human rights, and for saving Syria from the danger of an all-out civil war. It is sad, indeed painful, to acknowledge that the minaret of Syria's famous twelfth-century Ummayad mosque in Aleppo has today been destroyed.

The OIC urges the Syrian regime to immediately stop the killing of its citizens and engage in a serious dialogue between the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and representatives of the Syrian Government, in order to pave the way for a transition process that would enable the Syrian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations for democratic reform and change.

However, the OIC, while reiterating its commitment to a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria, calls upon the international community, in particular the Security Council, to assume its responsibilities and act promptly to stop the killing, destruction and displacement perpetrated against the Syrian people, and to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis.

In closing, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their right of return and self-determination and the establishment of their independent Palestinian State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset I should like to extend to you my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I should like also to thank you for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Let me also express my country's support for the statements either made or to be made later by the speakers on

behalf of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

I should like to begin by offering our condolences to the United States of America in connection with the victims of the criminal terrorist acts that took place in Boston last week. I wish also to reaffirm the sympathy and solidarity of the Saudi people with the American people. We feel deeply the grief suffered by the families of the victims, and we wish a speedy and full recovery to the injured, who include Saudi nationals.

Regrettably, the achievement of peace and the reaching of a just and equitable solution to the question of Palestine seems to remain a disappointing mirage. Israel continues to show its defiance and its disdain for the international community's will by proceeding with the expansion of settlements and by reaffirming its determination to persevere in that policy. In addition, it mistreats and devalues the lives of the Palestinian prisoners held in its jails by subjecting them to oppression and starvation, which led this month to the death of the martyr Maysara Abu Hamdieh.

Moreover, settlers continue to launch brutal attacks and assaults on Palestinians, the latest of which was the deliberate running over on 9 March of a 9-year-old Palestinian child by the name of Malik Adel Al-Shaer.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls on the Council to act to protect prisoners. We call on the Human Rights Council, the International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian organizations, as well as human rights organizations, to closely monitor the situation of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and to expose violations of their political, human and physical rights, as well as the severe criminal negligence that is inflicted upon them. We call on the international community to compel Israel to respect the rights of children, just as we draw the international community's attention to the report issued by UNICEF in February 2013 that explicitly depicts the brutal and inhuman punishments meted out by Israel and its occupation forces on the Palestinian children held in their prisons.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, indeed, all Arab countries continue to unequivocally choose peace as the strategic option; their good intentions were reflected in the launching of the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. However, the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and its continued contempt for and threats against Haram Al-Sharif are undermining any chance to achieve a just peace. Such a peace must be based on a globally agreed two-State solution, according to which the independent State of Palestine would be established with holy Jerusalem as its capital on land occupied by Israel within the borders of 4 June 1967.

The time has come to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the Syrian Arab Golan and occupied Lebanese territories. The time has come for the Middle East to enjoy a just, comprehensive and equitable peace. The time has indeed come for Palestinian refugees to return from the diaspora and have their aspirations realized pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The time has come for all citizens of our region to enjoy the fruits of peace and to live in security and stability. It is time for our societies to achieve the development and prosperity they deserve. We have had enough aggression, enough settlements, and enough occupation.

The situation in sister Syria is deteriorating by the day. So far, more than 70,000 people have been killed, as noted in the joint statement issued this month by United Nations humanitarian agencies. Similarly, in the past week the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has provided alarming figures about Syrian refugees, whose numbers are expected to reach more than 3 million. This problem has become an untenable economic burden on neighbouring countries. In fact, it has become a serious threat to security and stability in the region.

Through resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, the world has condemned the Syrian regime, which continues to struggle to maintain power over the bodies of Syrian children, women, the young and the elderly. Moreover, the League of Arab States, which represents the conscience of the Arab community, has stressed the need to reach an equitable solution by enabling the Syrian people to defend themselves, to preserve their rights and dignity, and to achieve their aspirations to freedom.

We have lately witnessed the bold steps taken by the Syrian opposition to unite and form the National Syrian Coalition, which has been recognized by more than 100 countries in the world as the representative of the Syrian people. Moreover, the Coalition has been invited to assume the Syrian seat in the League of Arab States. The time has come for the Syrian people to regain their due position in international organizations and bodies.

The Syrian people have spoken loudly and declared their will by demanding the departure of the Al-Assad regime, which lost its legitimacy as soon as it committed aggression and atrocities against its own people. The search for an equitable solution in Syria must begin by allowing the Syrian people to open a new chapter in their lives — a chapter upon which the sun of freedom will shine and which will allow them to exercise their genuine right to choose their own leadership and their representatives away from the authority of this tyrannical regime.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Dunlop (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their interventions.

As we enter the second quarter of 2013, the situation in the Middle East remains a source of grave concern for the world. The peace process between Israelis and Palestinians remains perilously stalled. The situation in Syria is deteriorating still further and the spillover effect on its neighbours, with a full-fledged humanitarian crisis, is ever more serious.

Despite the international community's best hopes that appropriate conditions for the resumption of negotiations on the two-State solution will eventually prevail, the continued occupation of Palestine indefinitely prolongs the uncertainty, instability and insecurity so detrimental to both Palestinians and Israelis. This state of affairs is untenable, and we must see progress towards two States living side by side in peace and security. That will be beneficial for the Israelis, the Palestinians and the world as a whole, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constitutes one of the most serious challenges to international peace and security.

The illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continue to pose the most significant and immediate threat to the two-State solution. Brazil reiterates yet again its call on Israel to cease all settlement construction immediately and unconditionally, to reconsider its decision to build in the so-called E-1 area, and to dismantle all settlement construction. Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute a major obstacle to peace, and contribute to the indefinite protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We must recall that Israel, as the strongest party and the occupying Power, bears the greater responsibility to take steps in order for peace to thrive.

Brazil followed with keen interest and expectation the recent visit of United States President, Barack Obama, to Israel and Palestine, and the subsequent talks between Secretary of State John Kerry and leaders of the region. We do hope that the resumption of effective Palestinian-Israeli negotiations will once again figure as a top priority for all involved. We urge Israelis and Palestinians to take advantage of the momentum that Brazil hopes will soon be generated and to show the political resolve needed to reach the goal of an independent, democratic, contiguous and economically viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel.

Although economic measures alone cannot substitute for progress in the political arena, we are convinced that fostering inclusive economic development in Palestine is essential to consolidate the State and build a solid basis for lasting peace.

In the same vein, the active engagement of Israeli and Palestinian civil societies with their Governments and with each other can contribute significantly to peace efforts. Indeed, many civil society organizations from both sides are a source of hope in the search for peace. It is important to give adequate voice to those civil organizations devoted to reconciliation, solidarity and sustainable peace. They should receive greater attention from multilateral organizations, including UNESCO and the Human Rights Council.

In addition to the efforts of individual actors to bring about the resumption of peace negotiations, the Security Council must actively carry out its Charter-based responsibility to promote peace in the Middle East, as it currently does in so many other parts of the world.

Turning to Syria, let me express our dismay at the continuation of the unabated violence against civilians and at the destruction of a brotherly country in a conflict that has simply lasted far too long and taken too high a toll. It must come to an end. Brazil reiterates its strong and unequivocal condemnation of all violations of human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated by all sides. As we have consistently pointed out, the primary responsibility to protect civilians lies with the Government of Syria. At the same time, we recall that

all parties must fulfil their obligation to halt violence and fully abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Brazil views with serious concern allegations that chemical weapons may have been used in Syria. We believe that it is essential that this issue be dealt with in accordance with established legal procedures, in an impartial and transparent manner. We recall Syria's obligation under the 1925 Geneva Protocol and reiterate our view of the importance of Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

If the violence is to end, all stakeholders, especially those who have significant influence on the parties, must actively seek to convince all sides that there is no military solution to the conflict and that they must engage in a Syrian-led negotiation process. For this purpose, it is critical to stop the flow of weapons into Syria, which further feeds the erroneous perception that military victory is a realistic possibility. Meanwhile, civilians continue to bear the brunt of doubtful political calculations.

We commend the work of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. Brazil regrets that political differences have prevented this body from engaging in the implementation of the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria of June 2012. The elements contained therein provide the guidelines for a viable negotiation process that will open the way to putting an end to the crisis and meeting the legitimate claims of the Syrian people for democracy, economic opportunity and social justice, while preserving the independence and territorial integrity of Syria. We continue to firmly believe that a Syrian-led transition can be attained only through comprehensive national dialogue. In this sense, we should listen carefully to the proposal of Guatemala for a second meeting of the Geneva Action Group for Syria.

In view of the grave deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, Brazil continues to urge all parties to facilitate safe, unfettered and immediate access for humanitarian organizations to all those in need. We praise the humanitarian assistance provided to Syrian refugees by neighbouring countries. Brazil has been contributing financially through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to mitigate the plight of the refugees and internally displaced persons. Consideration must also be given to the lifting of all unilateral sanctions that affect the lives of the civilian population, in line with recommendations contained in reports of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of the Human Rights Council.

Finally, let me briefly refer to Lebanon. Brazil commends President Sleiman and the Lebanese Government for continuing to adhere to the dissociation policy. We call upon parties in Syria and actors in Lebanon to effectively cooperate with the Lebanese Government in its efforts to preserve such a key policy.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I should like to express my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council by your country this month. There is no doubt that on the day when the results are assessed, the international community will remember the positive momentum that you gave to this body.

I appreciate this opportunity to share with the Council the conclusions of recent deliberations held by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the issue that is central to its mandate. Meeting on 17 and 18 April in Caracas, Venezuela, at the invitation of the Venezuelan Government, our Committee called on the international community to re-engage with Israel and the State of Palestine and to remove the obstacles to negotiation. We called for a revitalized Quartet, which should coordinate with key regional players and report to the Council on its efforts and progress made.

In Caracas, we strongly condemned settlements and demanded their removal. We also asked the Council and the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to uphold their responsibilities to ensure a end to settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories. The meeting in Caracas deplored the abuse of Palestinian prisoners, who are often detained without trial, leading to hunger strikes and deaths. Participating delegations also demanded the immediate release of all prisoners, including children, women, elected officials, pre-Oslo detainees, and those held without trial.

We expressed optimism that the passage of General Assembly resolution 67/19 would accelerate the

momentum in the Council towards full United Nations membership for the State of Palestine. We considered the vote on 29 November 2012 was a kind of vote of confidence, as Palestine meets the Charter criteria for statehood and is ready and willing to assume the responsibilities that come with United Nations membership. That is why we called on States that recognize Palestine at the United Nations to establish diplomatic relations with it.

We confirmed that the State of Palestine may avail itself of the dispute-settlement mechanisms provided by the International Court of Justice, and supported any action by Palestine to participate fully, effectively and constructively in the work of the United Nations and its conferences, including, for example, by signing treaties and conventions, including the Rome Statute. We also called on the international community unequivocally to support Palestinian unity.

Finally, at the Caracas meeting it was decided to ask the General Assembly to proclaim an international year of solidarity with the Palestinian people in 2014 and to launch a global campaign to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied territories, realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and promote a just, lasting, and comprehensive negotiated peace. Those, Sir, are the decisions that we took in Caracas and that the Committee, through me, wishes to convey to you.

The President: I now give the floor to the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; and the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Albania, align themselves with this statement.

Let me start with the Middle East peace process. Ending the conflict is a fundamental interest of the European Union, as well as of the parties themselves and the wider region. For this reason, the European Union reiterates the urgency of renewed, structural and substantial peace efforts in 2013.

The European Union commends and supports the diplomatic efforts currently being deployed by the United States to facilitate this process, including the personal commitment of President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry, and urges the parties to engage in good faith and with the necessary political will. The European Union also recalls the particular importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides regional support for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement.

The European Union is aware of the obstacles that stand in the way of a comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but it also believes that a decisive breakthrough is possible and that it must take place very soon. Waiting for supposedly better circumstances is not an option, as the time for implementing a two-State solution is running out.

The European Union reiterates that Israeli settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and undermine the viability of the two-State solution. The European Union recalls its long-standing concern about the extensive use by Israel of administrative detention without formal charge.

The new opportunity for peace must be seized and must be about more than simply getting the parties back to the negotiating table. Greater mutual confidence between the parties needs to be created. An appropriate framework, including parameters, is needed if negotiations are to have a chance of succeeding in a reasonable time frame.

The European Union stands ready to give active and concrete support to these efforts with all the instruments at its disposal. The emphasis that the European Union has placed in recent months on economic development in the occupied Palestinian territory — in particular in Area C of the West Bank — is fully in line with the options and initiatives currently under discussion. The European Union is ready and willing to take its support to the next level in order to help to ensure that resumed direct substantial negotiations between the parties are successful. In the same spirit, the European Union remains fully supportive of ongoing efforts aimed at Palestinian reconciliation under the leadership of President Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011.

The European Union condemns in the strongest terms the latest rocket fire from Gaza and rocket attacks against the Israeli city of Eilat, and reiterates its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel. It is vital that all parts of the agreement on the

cessation of hostilities be implemented. On the same line, the European Union also urges once again the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) in all its parts. The European Union will also continue to work to reduce actions on the ground that threaten the success of a renewed talks process.

The European Union understands that Salam Fayyad has decided to resign as Palestinian Prime Minister but that he will, for the time being, remain at the head of a caretaker Government. The European Union commends him for the remarkable results he has achieved in institution-building and in strengthening the rule of law over almost six years in a very challenging role.

The European Union recalls that, as the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, it has played a major role in bringing about these achievements, which led international financial institutions to declare that the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold for a functioning State. The European Union stresses in this regard the importance of the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability and economic viability. It underlines the necessity for the transfer of Palestinian tax and custom revenues to be made in full and on a regular basis.

If an agreement to finally end this conflict, which has lasted for decades, were to be reached, the door would open to a deepened and enhanced cooperation between the European Union and all the countries of the region, bringing benefits to all involved and contributing to the prospect of a new era of peace and prosperity throughout the Middle East.

Allow me now, Sir, to turn to Syria. The humanitarian briefings last week in this Council (see S/PV.6949) painted a horrific image, underscoring once again how civilians, and among them women and children, are paying the price for the fighting. The European Union recalls that the Syrian regime bears the primary responsibility for the ongoing violence, and condemns the widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. We continue to witness indiscriminate shelling with heavy weaponry and air and Scud missiles attacks by the Syrian regime; just recently we have heard reports about another onslaught of the regime forces close to Damascus, killing at least 109 people — many of them civilians — in the single suburb Jdeidet Al-Fadel.

The European Union recalls the latest report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which states that crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed in Syria. In this regard, let me stress that all parties to the conflict should commit to their obligation to abide by international humanitarian law — including the protection of medical facilities, staff and patients — and hold to account those in their ranks who do not. The European Union recalls that there should be no impunity for any such violations and abuses.

Syria has not responded to the repeated calls of the international community to ensure accountability through a national procedure. The European Union therefore wishes to recall that the Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, as requested in the Swiss letter to the Security Council of 14 January 2013, at any time. The European Union calls on the Security Council urgently to address the situation in Syria in all its aspects, including this issue.

We are maintaining our efforts towards reaching a credible political solution through a Syrian-led political transition principally based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012, and leading to a democratic, peaceful and inclusive Syria. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the establishment of the Syrian National Coalition, which the European Union accepts as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people, as a crucial step forward. We fully support Joint Special Representative Brahimi's efforts and the proposals he made on 29 January. In his briefing just a few days ago, he emphasized that the initiative of dialogue that was proposed in February by Sheikh Moaz Al-Khateeb should be further developed, not discarded.

The European Union is therefore encouraged by the acceptance by the Coalition of the principle of a political process under credible conditions. It is of the utmost importance that all Syrian opposition forces act in a united way towards achieving a democratic transition in Syria in the inclusive framework of the Syrian National Coalition. The European Union looks forward to working with the interim Chairman, Mr. George Sabra, to that end. In that regard, we also welcome the opening of the office of the Syrian National Coalition in New York.

Alongside its diplomatic action to promote a political settlement, the European Union is the leading

humanitarian donor in the context of the Syrian conflict, as part of a wider international response. The total European Union response to the crisis, including pledged support, has reached a level of close to €800 million committed by the European Union and its member States. However, that is still an insufficient amount to cope with the growing number of persons in need. We are particularly grateful to the Governments and peoples of Syria's neighbouring countries for the generosity they have shown, and we call on Member States to honour the pledges they have made, including those made most recently at the Kuwait Conference.

However, money is only one aspect of the problem. Given the quickly deteriorating situation and the high risk to the overall stability of the region, an effective delivery of aid to all those in need is urgently required. As was requested by Under-Secretary-General Amos in her statement before the Council last week (see S/PV.6949), the European Union will take steps in line with humanitarian principles to provide humanitarian assistance to all areas in the country, including those currently not reached by humanitarian aid.

The complex situation on the ground and the difficulty in gaining access require that the European Union work with the Syrian National Coalition where necessary to calibrate its response to the real needs of the population inside Syria. The European Union also urges the regime in Damascus to allow delivery of humanitarian assistance by whatever routes are most effective, in order to reach all the population in need, including across borders, and to allow a broader scope of humanitarian actors to work in Syria. We welcome the fact that the Security Council was finally able to agree on joint messages in that regard after the humanitarian briefing, but more is required from the Council.

The Syrian conflict has already spilled over beyond Syrian borders. The crisis is escalating in a dramatic and unpredictable way, with a huge potential to destabilize the entire region. We urge the Security Council to actively follow the situation in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey and other spillover threats. The European Union recalls the obligation of the Syrian authorities to respect the sovereignty and integrity of neighbouring States and condemns its violations of those principles.

Lastly, the European Union is extremely concerned by allegations that chemical weapons might have been used in Syria. We emphasize that any use of chemical weapons, whether by a State or a non-State actor, is abhorrent and must be unreservedly condemned. The European Union and its member States have addressed a letter to the Secretary-General welcoming his decision to start an investigation into that matter. We remain convinced that the seriousness of the allegations that have been made warrants a full, independent and impartial investigation and that such an investigation should commence quickly and cover all serious allegations about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. All parties in Syria, particularly the Syrian regime, must cooperate fully with the investigation, including by providing unimpeded access for investigators. They must also ensure the safety and security of chemical weapons stockpiles, pending independently verified destruction under supervision by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to recall that all speakers shall limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Umemoto (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Eugène-Richard Gasana, Permanent Representative of Rwanda, for his leadership in convening this open debate. I would also like to express appreciation to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Japan has long understood the Palestinians' aspiration to build an independent State and has supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Japan thus endorses a two-State solution, under which Israel and a future independent Palestinian State would coexist, side by side, in peace and security. In the light of that position, Japan voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 67/19 regarding the status of Palestine at the United Nations in November 2012.

Japan once again calls upon Palestine to immediately resume direct negotiations with Israel and not to use its non-member Observer State status, granted in accordance with the General Assembly resolution, to act in a way that might negatively affect or hinder direct negotiations with Israel. We ask for prudence with respect to its conduct, such as applying for membership in international organizations, an action that might negatively affect prospects for the resumption of negotiations.

Israel, for its part, should freeze its settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The transfer of tax revenues, which Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, is a necessary task that Israel should conduct for the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority. In that regard, Japan appreciates Israel's resumption of the transfers in March.

With respect to the issue of Palestinian prisoners, Japan worries that that issue could worsen Palestinian sentiment and thus negatively affect the peace process. We hope to see the new Israeli Administration create conditions for a resumption of meaningful negotiations.

As for the situation in Gaza, Japan is concerned by the sporadic rocket fire into Israel that occurred recently, despite the ceasefire brokered by Egypt in November 2012. We urge all parties concerned to respect the ceasefire with a view to realizing a durable calm in Gaza.

The entire international community should mobilize the political and economic means at its disposal to help Israel and Palestine overcome their differences and realize substantial progress this year. Japan welcomes the renewed commitment by the United States to the peace process following President Obama's visit to the region in March 2013. At this critical juncture, we need to engage with key stakeholders in Arab and other regions in a more effective manner. In that context, Japan renews its commitment to making an active contribution — in cooperation with the United States, Arab countries, the Quartet and other partners — to that end.

Japan has been committed to assisting Palestinian State-building efforts since the Oslo accords. During the past fiscal year, Japan provided assistance in the amount of approximately $85 million, including budget support for the Palestinian Authority and contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We have also been addressing the needs of socially vulnerable communities in East Jerusalem, Area C, and Gaza by implementing various projects in fields such as job creation and the social participation of youth, child education, health services and hygiene.

Japan has been promoting regional cooperation. Our initiative "Corridor for peace and prosperity" has been making steady progress since 2006. In addition, Japan launched a new cooperation framework among East Asian countries to assist Palestinian development by co-hosting, together with Palestine, the first Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development in February 2013 in Tokyo. As a follow-up, a meeting among participant countries' aid agencies and a business leaders' meeting are each scheduled to take place during the course of this year. We believe that synergetic effects can be generated with the new United States initiative that Secretary of State John Kerry recently announced on business expansion in the West Bank.

Allow me now to touch upon the question of Syria. Japan is deeply concerned by the serious and deteriorating situation in Syria and profoundly deplores the death of many thousands of people as a result of the continued violence. The briefing to the Council by United Nations humanitarian organizations last week (S/PV.6949) was yet another occasion to listen to appalling accounts of the tragic incidents taking place on the ground there every day.

As an active member of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, Japan reiterates its call on all parties in Syria to immediately halt the violence and abuses of human rights, and condemns the Syrian authorities for not keeping their own commitments and responsibilities to protect their own citizens.

It is hardly realistic to expect a smooth political transition with President Al-Assad remaining in power. At the same time, we need to deal with threats posed by extremists. From that standpoint, Japan supports the diplomatic efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, and hopes that the Syrian National Coalition, widely acknowledged by the international community as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, will consolidate its base to play a major role in advancing the process of a Syrian-led political transition.

We regret to see that the Security Council has failed so far to take necessary action to bring about a political transition in Syria, despite its primary responsibility in maintaining international peace and security in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In such circumstances, Japan will favourably consider Qatar's initiative to seek the avenue of the General Assembly to underscore the urgent necessity to stop violence and explore a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

With regard to chemical weapons, Japan urges the Syrian authorities to refrain from using them or transferring them to non-State actors in any circumstances. Supporting the Secretary-General's investigation into all alleged use of the weapons, Japan also demands that full and unfettered access be granted to his investigation team by the Syrian authorities.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. Japan urges all parties in Syria to ensure rapid and unimpeded access for aid organizations to those in need, and to cooperate fully with the United Nations and relevant organizations to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The funding situation also needs to be improved. I would like to announce that Japan has already disbursed a total of about $65 million that it pledged at the high-level international humanitarian donor conference for Syria, held in Kuwait City in January. As a result, Japan's assistance has now totalled $80.5 million. We remain committed to significantly contributing to international efforts and encourage other donor countries to do so as well.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April.

The question of Palestine remains the foremost issue in the Middle East, and the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Undoubtedly, the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has lasted for over six decades, will not be resolved until the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories comes to an end; the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, as acknowledged by legitimate international declarations, are realized; and a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian State is established.

Palestine achieved a great breakthrough last November when it ascended to the status of a non-member observer State in the United Nations, with the support of the majority of the Member States. We hope that the achievement will be further built upon by greater international recognition of the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

The continued expansion by the Israeli occupation authorities of settlement activities in the heart of the West Bank, Jerusalem and its surroundings, especially after the ascension of Palestine as a non-member Observer State; the continued expulsion of Arab inhabitants from their homes; and the expropriation of their properties are blatant evidence of the insincerity of Israel's claims about its desire for peace, and further undermine efforts to create a Palestinian State and its national authority. The gross legal and human rights violations carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and its lack of respect for its international obligations are further evidence of that insincerity.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its condemnation of all Israeli practices that have seriously hindered international efforts for peace and exacerbated the tense and unstable situation in the entire region. We renew our call on the international community, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its full responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to pressure Israel to halt its illegitimate activities and for the expeditious resumption of peace talks towards a fair and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question on the basis of the two-State solution, as indicated in the Arab Peace Initiative.

We are deeply concerned about the grave humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, as a result of the continued blockade and closure of the entry points, leading to grave violations of international law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. We call on Israel to end the blockade, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009); to remove all its military checkpoints from other Palestinian cities and villages; and immediately and unconditionally to release Palestinian prisoners held in inhumane conditions in Israeli jails.

The United Arab Emirates is following with great concern the deteriorating humanitarian conditions of the Syrian people and Syrian refugees and the escalating violence and displacement in the Syrian Arab Republic. We call on the international community to shoulder its humanitarian and political responsibility to halt the great tragedy being endured by the Syrian people. We emphasize the sovereignty and integrity of Syria and the need for a political process that would end the bloodshed and preserve the unity of Syria through an orderly transition of authority. The United Arab Emirates has shouldered its responsibilities towards the Syrian people by providing relief and aid to the refugees

in neighbouring Arab States and by supporting Arab international initiatives in that regard.

We renew our support for the efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to resolve the crisis peacefully, in accordance with the terms of reference of his mandate.

We renew our commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and were deeply disappointed by the postponement of the conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destructionin the Middle East, which was to be held in March 2015. We call for that conference to be held without delay, for all relevant parties to participate, and for Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subject all its facilities to the comprehensive guarantee system.

We call upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency, to fulfil its international obligations, and remove all doubts and concerns about its nuclear programme. We hope for a peaceful solution to that crisis that would remove the shadow of danger from our region, alleviate doubts concerning the nuclear programme in Iran and reaffirm its peaceful nature.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Israel occupies Arab land in Lebanon and Palestine, yet no one at the international level has acted to put an end to those occupations. The overwhelming enthusiasm that some are expressing for the Security Council to adopt resolutions under Chapter VII dissipates when it comes to Israel, although the occupation has been going on now for over half a century. Israel is committing documented, systematic violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. But, paradoxically, no official in Israel has ever been punished for that.

Today we have heard suggestions that certain dossiers should be referred to the International Criminal Court, but that desire disappears when it comes to Israel, whose violations have clearly reached the level of war crimes or crimes against humanity. Israel is implacably pursuin its settlement activity, to which many have referred today and which has been widely condemned. The surface area of the settlements has risen by 182 per cent. The number of settlements has gone up 189 per cent. Paradoxically, there has been no international response to deter Israel. Israel has been spared the sort of military and economic sanctions that are imposed on others, even though everyone is agreed that settlement building is illegal and an obstacle to peace.

Israel is behaving in flagrant violation of international law. The paradox is that Israel is considered by some to be a racist, thuggish State when it comes to international law. Israel has not respected any of the resolutions adopted against it. It has enacted more than 60 racist resolutions against the Palestinian people since 1968.

Paradoxically, no genuine calls have been made for the freeing of the Palestinian prisoners. Very few have called for the Israeli detention camps to be opened up to international observers or non-governmental organizations, even though a great number of detainees have lost their lives due to torture, medical negligence or hunger strike, or have been killed in a premeditated way.

Israel introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East, and in so doing precluded the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in our region. But the paradox is that none of the threats and sanctions imposed or pressure exerted on certain States, particularly those that have peaceful nuclear programmes in conformity with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, have been applied to Israel, despite the danger that Israel's weapons represent for the region and for the world. These are the realities and the paradoxes that some States with influence within the Organization try to sweep under the rug and turn our attention from because these realities are crystal clear.

How should we answer someone who might quite rightly ask why we in the United Nations are failing on the political, humanitarian and ethical fronts to meet our responsibilities to deal with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and to put an end to these flagrant violations by Israel? Is it possible or admissible for certain States to impose their own biased agendas on our Organization? Everyone has the right to know openly whether this failure of our Organization is desired by those influential States, or whether it is just the result of a lack of power, collusion and weakness on the part of States? Or should we consider the Israeli occupation as something that transcends international law and accountability because Israel enjoys the favour

of a specific country? If that is the case, then let us call things by their name; our Organization should not be called the United Nations, but the organization of the countries of major influence.

The United Nations and its Members must act. Since it began 65 years ago, the Palestinian nightmare has not sufficed to provoke the conscience of the international community into adopting earnest measures that would lead to a fair solution for the Palestinians and restore their legitimate rights, rather than simply making pointless and vain speeches before the Security Council and other international forums. What can the United Nations and its Member States say to the Syrian people who remain under Israeli occupation after more than 45 years? What can the United Nations say to them when they call into question the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations? It is the United Nations that has been incapable of taking real measures against Israel to force it to implement relevant resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981).

What can we say about the absence of necessary international efforts to put an end to Israeli settlement-building in the Golan? What can we say about the inability of international human rights mechanisms to put an end to Israeli humanitarian and human rights violations? How can we respond when we see that there is no international reaction?

The indiscriminant and racist policies and practices of the Israeli regime continue. They continue to remove people from the separation area. Israel is building a separation wall in the occupied Golan. What can we say about the shots fired towards Syrian territory? And what of the licence that Israel and the United States have granted themselves to explore for oil in the Golan?

These are all questions that I would put to members and ask for responses, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Israel is assisting terrorist groups in the separation wall area and ensuring that wounded terrorists get to Israeli hospitals so that they can be treated in Israel before they are brought back to Syrian territory along the same line of separation. We must be aware of the fact that the aid provided to these terrorist groups in the area of separation is not simply a blatant violation of international law but also endangers the lives of United Nations personnel in the area.

On 6 March, terrorist groups kidnapped 21 peacekeepers who were working in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. The terrorists were allowed to take the hostages to Jordan so that their photos could be taken with the terrorists. Israel then authorized the return of the terrorists to Syria.

As I have in other statements that I have made with regard to the situation in the Middle East, I would like to underscore the fact that it is dangerous to introduce other subjects under this agenda item because that could undermine the historic importance of this agenda item and divert our debates from their primary objective of considering ways to put an end to the Israeli occupation. Therefore, I am not going to respond to the vindictive allegations made against my country, Syria, by certain delegations because I do not want to fall into the trap of burying the real point of this agenda item.

However, we have a great deal to say to refute the vindictive allegations made by States that support and arm terrorists, sow fanaticism and destruction in Syria, and work to ensure that all peaceful solutions to the crisis will fail. I am referring to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Israel and certain countries of the European Union, some of which are members of the Council. All of them are engaged in provoking an inter-Islamic conflict as a substitute for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to bury the Palestinian cause and distance themselves from the mess of the two-State solution. In their clever statements today, the representatives of that alliance of States have confirmed our conviction that they seek by every possible means to steer attention from the point at hand — the situation in the Middle East — in order to put the situation in my country, Syria, under the spotlight.

The situation that has developed is a humanitarian situation and they want to turn it into a political crisis with a humanitarian angle. In that connection, I call on the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to direct the content and provocative nature of their statements to the miserable living conditions endured by the populations of their two countries. Those populations are deprived of a constitution, a parliament, civil and political liberties and any form of national opposition, not even a formal one. Saudi and Qatari politicians have spread Salafi, Wahhabi, Takfiri terrorism and perverted the precepts of Islam, which is based on tolerance. Those same politicians are today responsible for shamefully sacrificing the lives of tens of thousands of Muslim youth throughout the world under the pretext of Jihad for the sake of petrodollars.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to address the Security Council at this meeting on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). I wish to convey the Movement's appreciation for Rwanda's presidency of the Security Council for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory regrettably continues to deteriorate owing to the oppressive, violent practices that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to inflict on the Palestinian people in violation of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. Regrettably, since the last open debate (see S/PV.6906), despite regional and international peace efforts, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its colonization of Palestinian land, its blockade of the Gaza Strip, its military raids and arrest campaign, and all forms of collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population under its occupation.

As stressed in the recent meeting of a delegation led by the NAM Chair with Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon and the March President of the Security Council, the deteriorating situation of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, which are being unlawfully held by Israel, the occupying Power, is a matter of grave concern to the Movement. Furthermore, Israel's violent suppression of non-violent civilian protests against the occupation, particularly against the abuse of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including the recent torture and killing of a Palestinian detainee and in solidarity with prisoners on hunger strike, as well as against Israel's settlement, wall and colonization of Palestinian land, has caused extensive casualties and further destabilized the situation and is a matter that preoccupies the Movement.

We, the Non-Aligned Movement, condemn the continued unlawful detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including children, women and numerous elected officials, who continue to be held under harsh, inhumane conditions and subject to physical and mental ill-treatment. In that regard, the Movement condemns, inter alia, Israel's use of torture and all other forms of physical and psychological mistreatment and deprivation of Palestinian prisoners. The Non-Aligned Movement calls for the release of all Palestinian political prisoners.

The Movement condemns ongoing Israeli settlement activities, which constitute grave breaches of international law and violate numerous United Nations resolutions, including resolutions of the Security Council, as well as other illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to defy international law and the will and demands of the international community with that destructive, provocative and illegal practice, which is threatening the realization of a just and peaceful solution.

Thousands of Palestinians have been displaced from their lands in the Jordan Valley, where thousands more are at risk of displacement due to Israel's illegal colonization, as well as in and around occupied East Jerusalem, where the occupying Power continues to pursue measures aimed at the quiet transfer or depopulation of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants and at ensuring a Jewish majority in the city. Violence and terror also continue to be waged by extremist Israeli settlers against the Palestinian civilian population and at Muslim and Christian holy places, including in Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls for a complete end to all Israeli settlement activities, the construction of the wall, home demolitions, residency revocations, excavations, including near Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the closure of Palestinian institutions in the city, a cessation of the transfer of Israeli settlers to Palestinian land and an end to their lawlessness. The Non-Aligned Movement also calls for the complete lifting of the blockade of Gaza and for international attention to the severe humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses the urgent need for action by the international community to redress the unjust and critical situation endured by the Palestinian people under Israel's almost half a century of military occupation. The relevant United Nations resolutions and international law must be implemented. The responsibilities of the Security Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security, are clear. It is high time that those responsibilities were upheld. The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines. It must act to advance efforts to resolve the prolonged and tragic conflict as a result of which the Palestinian people have too long been denied their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and to return, and the freedom of

an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Turning to Lebanon, the Movement condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. It calls on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and to avoid a resurgence of hostilities. Such actions also constitute a threat to international peace and security and are a continuation of Israel's aggression against Lebanon.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement is concerned about the recent violation of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, which brings the risk of tension, escalation and confrontation in the area. The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose its own jurisdiction and administration in that area, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The States members of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterate their continuous calls on the Security Council to act urgently in order to send a clear message to Israel, the occupying Power, that all those illegal actions must be fully halted forthwith and that it must comply with international law.

Let me now speak in my national capacity. I would like to refer to the present political and security situations in the Middle East region, which is becoming increasingly fragile and precarious. That is particularly true with regard to the situation in Syria.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that any foreign military involvement against Syria would only exacerbate the crisis and extend the insecurity to other countries in the region. Therefore, Iran is of the view that the way out of the present crisis in Syria lies in strengthening a comprehensive and peaceful political process aimed at establishing, first and foremost, a cessation of violence between the parties and the holding of a national dialogue between the opposition and the Syrian Government for a peaceful political process. The regional countries should cooperate with one another to facilitate such dialogue and national reconciliation. To that end, the Islamic Republic of Iran has actively participated in talks with regional countries, in particular Egypt and Turkey. It seems that there is no alternative if we want to restore peace and stability to Syria and to the region.

Turning now to what was said against my country by the representative of the Israeli regime in the Chamber, it is not my delegation's intention to comment in detail. I would like to point out only that the Islamic Republic of Iran has officially declared its commitment to the fundamental principles of the Charter to refrain from the threat or use of force against any member of the United Nations. The Israeli regime, with a dark history of terrorist activities, possessing hundreds of nuclear warheads and known as an illegal force in the world, would do better to keep quiet and to stop threatening other countries. At the very least, the Council should demand that the Israeli regime abandon its policy of flouting international law and the Charter of the United Nations and immediately desist from resorting to the threat or use of force.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to convey our appreciation for Rwanda's presidency of the Security Council this month and for having convened this open debate at such a crucial point in time. At the same time, let me also thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing.

Ukraine is deeply concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and in the Palestinian territories, in particular. It is our strong conviction that the solution to the question of Palestine should be based on the full implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the Madrid Peace Conference formula and the Oslo Accords. The lack of progress achieved in the peace process, including on the settlement issue, lies at the heart of the Palestinian people's frustration. In that regard, I should emphasize that there is no alternative to the quest for peace and to the political solution of the crisis.

Ukraine rejects any acts of terrorism, by whomsoever, as a means of reaching any political goal. In our view, any violent or provocative actions by radical elements should be halted resolutely since they lead only to a further escalation of violence.

It is our belief that the momentum exists and that, under the current circumstances, there is no alternative for the parties but to overcome their differences and, for the sake of peace, to come back to the negotiating table. We strongly appeal to all sides to refrain from any unilateral actions that could further aggravate the situation or pre-empt the outcome of the final status talks.

I would like to reiterate Ukraine's determination to contribute further to the search for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In our view, such a peace will come about only on the basis of an agreement that ensures the Palestinian people's legitimate right to self-determination and statehood, while, at the same time, respecting Israel's right to peace and security.

Ukraine reaffirms its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We believe that the United Nations should retain its leading role in solving the Syrian crisis. We strongly support the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria.

We are convinced that the parties to the conflict should do their utmost to bring about a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms, paving the way for a Syrian-led political transition. It is our belief that a national dialogue that includes all strata of the Syrian society, together with the introduction of social and political reforms, is the only effective mechanism to resolve the existing internal problems.

Ukraine, which fully supports the universal principles and norms of international law, joins the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to avoid the further militarization of the conflict and to alleviate the suffering of the innocent population. In that regard, as stipulated by a decree of the President of Ukraine, my country has, through the United Nations, provided humanitarian assistance to the Syrian civilian population, including Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

As to the way forward, we strongly believe that the Geneva communiqué creates all the necessary conditions for the parties to reach a peaceful political solution and to stop the violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I would also like to express our appreciation for the convening of today's quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

The Middle East peace process is passing through its most difficult phase in recent times. For more than two years, the parties have not held a single official meeting. The efforts of the international community, including those of the Quartet, have failed to make any impact on the ground. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the intensification of settlement activities is quickly eroding the very foundation of a two-State solution. The plight of ordinary Palestinians is worsening every day due to roadblocks and related occupation infrastructure that put restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods.

The blockade of Gaza has also continued to cause a great deal of hardship for the Palestinians. The plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails requires immediate attention. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority is facing one of its worst financial crises, which threatens to erode the progress made in building Palestinian State institutions. If the present situation persists, the international community will risk seeing a serious destabilization of the region. It is therefore imperative that efforts aimed at breaking the deadlock and resuming the peace process be reinvigorated.

Any political process, to be meaningful, must put an end to Israeli settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities are a violation of international law and harmful to the peace process. We join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities in order for the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

We have noted that Israel has recently taken measures to allow the flow of basic goods into Gaza. Still, the continuing blockade remains in force and is adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. We continue to call for the complete lifting of the blockade. The parties should also fully implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement reached in November 2012.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, at its recent meeting in Brussels last month, underscored the urgent

need to close the Palestinian Government's financing gap, estimated at $1.2 billion for the current year. In that context, it is important that the international community continue to respond to the financial needs of the Palestinian authority.

Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine. Since then, India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people have been strengthened and reinvigorated by regular interactions. As a member of the Security Council in 2011 and 2012, India supported Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. Continuing that support, India co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution 67/19 in November 2012, which upgraded the status of Palestine to non-member observer State. India has consistently supported a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue with a view to achieving a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in various Security Council resolutions and the Quartet road map.

India has also partnered with Palestine in socioeconomic development and has extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority. As in previous years, India pledged an amount of $10 million in 2012 as budgetary support to Palestine. India also annually contributes $1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. India is in the process of implementing projects, bilaterally and through the India, Brazil and South Africa Fund, including in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and school construction.

In conclusion, let me express our deep concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria. We believe that the joint communiqué of the Action Group (S/2012/523, annex), adopted in June 2012, provides a good basis for resolution of the Syrian crisis. A Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sectors of Syrian society is the only way to resolve the crisis and must be seriously pursued by all parties concerned.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba endorses the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In my national capacity, I wish to highlight some aspects relevant to the matter at hand.

This is the second open debate this year on the Middle East region held at the Security Council without achieving any progress. It is unfortunate that the situation in the region, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, has seen no progress. The region is still marked by instability and insecurity.

The main political problem in the Middle East is the systematic aggression by Israel against Palestine. The Security Council must play its role in defence of international peace and security and immediately adopt concrete practical measures to compel Israel to end its abuses and illegal policies and practices against the Palestinian people. Israel's behaviour deliberately contravenes United Nations resolutions and international law, poses a threat to regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people by means of flagrant, systematic and inhumane abuses that should be condemned by this organ. Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the major obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East region. There will be no peace in the Middle East as long as those aggressions persist and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are not taken into account.

The General Assembly adopted the historic resolution 67/19 when a majority of its members granted Palestine non-member observer status in the United Nations. Cuba supported that resolution, in accordance with its long-standing position in support of the cause of the Palestinian people and the defence of its rights. However, such action constitutes an interim step towards the eventual accession of Palestine to the United Nations as a fully fledged Member State. The Security Council must consider and approve, without further delay, the request made by Palestine in 2011 to be recognized as a United Nations Member State.

Today, the situation in the region is tense and explosive, due to the increasing number of illegal Israeli settlements, the harsh and distressing reality of Palestinian prisoners and the blockade to entry of goods, humanitarian aid and fuel in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian prisoners lack rights to essential goods and services, namely, water, food, medical care, education, visits and legal defence. In addition, they are subjected to continous physical and psychological abuse. The recent death of a 64-year-old prisoner due to medical negligence by the occupying Power has led to violent clashes in East Jerusalem, Hebron and other localities of the occupied territory, where Israel's use of excessive force has injured dozens of people and killed two Palestinian adolescents.

Only an end to the settlement policy, the release of Palestinian prisoners and the lifting of the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip will make it possible to launch a significant political process that will bring peace to the region.

Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cuba calls upon Israel to comply with international law and to put an end to its occupation of all Arab territories, and reiterates once again its support for a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East region.

Cuba is closely following the situation in Syria and its international impact, aware of the fact that the information available is frequently manipulated. The calls made by those who promote regime change in Syria and rely on the use of force and violence are alarming. They should instead contribute to dialogue and negotiation between the parties.

The Security Council was not conceived as an instrument to be used by certain Powers to provoke regime change in selected countries. There is reason to be concerned about intentions to promote Security Council actions and declarations aimed at increasing violence, undermining a sovereign Government, generating insecurity and leading a nation to a social and humanitarian crisis with unforeseeable consequences.

The obligation of the Security Council is to promote peace, not violence; to prevent destabilization, not to finance, arm and train those involved in destabilization; and to protect the innocent, not to use and manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

Cuba objects to NATO's maneuvering to have the Security Council approve the aggression in Syria. It also rejects the complicity of the mass media, which are accustomed to distorting reality and to not being answerable for their actions.

Cuba shares the concern about the loss of innocent lives in Syria and elsewhere in the world. It also condemns the acts of violence being committed against defenceless civilians by all those involved in that or any other conflict.

A civil war in Syria or a foreign-force intervention would have serious consequences for international peace and security, especially for the Middle East region. We reject attempts to turn the alleged protection of human lives into an excuse for foreign intervention, either directly or through support for irregular armed groups, including the use of mercenaries, who only sow destruction and multiply the number of deaths.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Syrian people to the full exercise of their self-determination and sovereignty, without foreign interference or intervention of any kind. The role of the international community, in this time of difficulty for a State Member of the United Nations, is to offer its assistance in order to safeguard peace and stability in that country.

Finally, Cuba reiterates its rejection of the double standard prevailing in the Security Council. On the one hand, it can be very flexible and tries to ensure, through all kinds of pressure, that certain situations are considered in the Council. On the other hand, when the situation does not suit the interests of certain countries, it is slow to act, or simply fails to act, as in the case of Palestine. After dozens of resolutions by this organ, there has been no progress in achieving the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It has shown its inability to grant Palestine its well-deserved status of full United Nations Member and does nothing to stop the ongoing violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Silva (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate. The Sri Lanka delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza, where conditions are unsustainable. We stress the urgent need for the leadership to end the marginalization and oppression of Palestinians in their own land. International humanitarian law requires the protection of the civilian population in the occupied territories. It is regrettable that unethical practices continue that could erode the likelihood of a two-State solution.

The settlement activities run counter to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and are therefore a factor in the recurrence of violence in the region. The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze on settlement activity. The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and the International Court of Justice all have condemned the settlement activities as illegal. Ending those practices, which contribute to much human suffering and continuing friction in the occupied territories, are essential steps that need to be taken to improve the situation on the ground as well as for confidence-building.

The blockade imposed on Gaza has resulted in approximately 80 per cent of families in that location being dependent on humanitarian aid from the United Nations for their survival. Restrictions on imports and exports are stifling economic growth. Those restrictions need to be lifted within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009), as that would contribute significantly to the economic advancement of Gaza and the well-being of the people.

Sri Lanka also supports the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which keep the majority of the people in Gaza supplied with the bare necessities.

Both parties to the conflict must create the environment necessary to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice. We are also mindful of the security needs of Israel. The indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians, including the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, will widen the gap between the parties. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

It is important to remain engaged in the process of finding a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. The viability of the two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people, and we are confident that Palestinian internal reconciliation efforts will continue. The progress made by the Palestinian Authority despite the severe political and economic constraints is commendable.

Sri Lanka supports Palestine's application for admission to full membership in the United Nations, and it is our hope that the Security Council will give it favourable consideration.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka welcomes the declaration made in solidarity with the Palestinian people and State of Palestine adopted at the recent special meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held in Caracas.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your presidency of the Council this month, and I thank you for holding this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing today.

Today we meet in our quarterly open debate at a time when the peace efforts are at a very difficult stage. The stalemate in the peace process has lasted for years now and there seems to be no hope for an end to the deadlock or a resumption of negotiations to achieve a durable, just and comprehensive peace that would put an end to the occupation and confirm the recognition of the Palestinian State as an independent and sovereign State, within the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We believe that full responsibilty for the stalemate lies with Israel's continued practices, as the occupying Power, its procrastination, its grave violations of international law and the basic terms of reference of the peace process, and its continued enforcement of a policy of fait accompli, enacted through further annexation of Palestinian territories, the Judaization of Jerusalem and its separation from its surroundings in the West Bank, which we denounce. Israel has also carried out forced expulsions and cancelled Palestinian identity cards, while increasing and intensifying its settlement activities and campaigns of escalating violence by settlers against Palestinians and against Islamic and Christian places of worship, including the Al-Aqsa mosque. The current violations and abuses against Palestinian prisoners in full view of the entire world are grave violations of the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Firm and urgent action is required on the part of the international community to end the bloodshed, which cannot be prolonged or tolerated and which carries the risk of an escalation of the situation at any moment, especially in the light of Israel's continued policy of arbitrary arrests of Palestinians, including women and children. The practices of Israel as the occupying Power over the past decades can be considered a form of collective punishment, and the international community can no longer justify this policy to current and future generations.

We believe that the resumption of negotiations on a fair and honest basis requires putting an end to those practices in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem; addressing the question of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons; and immediately lifting the unfair and oppressive blockade of Gaza. Those measures are based on the principles of international legitimacy and are basic requirements for the resumption of the peace process.

Tunisia reaffirms that achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is a comprehensive effort that can be realized only through an Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab occupied territories, including the Arab Syrian Golan, a withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders and from the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon, and a recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as the basis for a two-State solution in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace.

We also express our deep concern regarding the situation in the brotherly country of Syria, where the ongoing killing and destruction have had grave consequences for Syria and the entire region, in particular at the humanitarian level. We reiterate our support for the aspirations of the Syrian people to liberty, dignity and democracy, and we recall the resolutions adopted by the most recent Arab summit in Doha, which were mentioned by the representative of the League of Arab States in his statement. We also emphasize the need for an expedited political solution that would put an end to the crisis, which can no longer be tolerated or prolonged, while emphasizing the unity of Syrians and the territorial integrity of Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): In order for members to be able to go home before midnight, I have decided to circulate my speech but not read the whole thing. Members will thus have to promise to read it.

The civil war in Syria is a catastrophe with no end in sight. The situation of the millions of civilians in Syria and in neighbouring countries continues to deteriorate and has reached unbelievable dimensions. The country is being reduced to rubble, and the Syrian State is gradually collapsing. Cities and neighbourhoods are being destroyed under constant fire from missiles and heavy artillery on an appalling scale. There seems to be no end to the suffering of the civilian population. We are witnessing brutal suppression and indiscriminate killings. The conflict is spilling across borders and threatening regional stability.

The paralysis of the Security Council makes the situation worse. As a result, the dynamic of the conflict is becoming entrenched in a logic of violence. Norway urges the Council to take a clear and unanimous stand against the continuing and gross violations of international humanitarian law. The international community must, at an absolute minimum, stand up for the basic principles of international humanitarian law, even if it is divided over how to achieve a political solution.

We urge all countries to stop the flow of weapons into Syria. A political solution to the conflict is the only way to save the Syrian people from further suffering, for which the regime bears primary responsibility. Therefore, our message to Al-Assad is that he must start transferring executive power with a view to enabling a

meaningful political transition towards a pluralistic and representative Syria. Our message to the opposition groups is that they must contribute to a meaningful political dialogue and negotiate within the framework of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). Our message to the Security Council members is that they must find a way to promote a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué. We must give our full support to the work of Joint Special Representative Brahimi.

Norway is committed to a democratic, pluralistic and unified post-Al-Assad Syria. We support the efforts of the opposition groups to organize themselves on a more inclusive and representative basis. In the current situation, Norway regards the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. We are assisting the Coalition in building up capacities to provide practical help on the ground and to train people for a future pluralistic and democratic Syria. The litmus test is whether we succeed in making the situation better for all Syrian people, ensuring that the rights of all minority groups are protected. Thus, whether they are men or women, Alawite, Druze, Kurd, Sunni, Shia or Christian, all Syrians should be guaranteed a role in shaping the future of Syria.

We are facing a humanitarian crisis of colossal proportions. The Syrian Government has shown a flagrant disregard for the humanitarian consequences of its indiscriminate warfare. The opposition groups are also guilty of serious disrespect for fundamental humanitarian principles regarding the protection of humanitarian personnel and installations. We therefore call on the Syrian Government and the opposition groups to respect international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights and desist from the despicable practice of gender-based violence. Those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held accountable.

Since March 2011, Norway has provided $75 million in humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees and to those who are suffering inside Syria.

Let me now turn to the Middle East peace process. On 19 March, Norway chaired the spring meeting of the donor support groups for Palestine — the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) — held in Brussels. Twenty years have passed since the AHLC was set up to build the foundations for a Palestinian State and to develop its institutions. To fully succeed, the State-building exercise may need to be accompanied by meaningful steps towards the two-State solution. If that vision is lost, the willingness of donors to contribute will indeed diminish.

The financial situation is serious. Palestinian revenues are insufficient for a balanced budget, while donor contributions have declined in recent years. Last year, the Palestinian Authority's deficit reached $1.4 billion, with donor contributions covering only $826 million. At the meeting in Brussels, the donors promised that they would continue to provide funds, and contributions may reach $1 billion for 2013. That could cover most of the Palestinian budget deficit this year, but it will not resolve the long-term challenges.

More and more donors are questioning the sustainability of the current approach. They are asking whether we are not in fact financing a permanent occupation, given that there are no substantial improvements in those areas or signs of a rapid resumption of negotiations. The recent resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad reflects the increasing frustration of the Palestinians. I salute my good friend Mr. Fayyad for his steadfast work over many years on building up a sustainable Palestinian economy and laying a solid foundation for the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The parties need to recommit themselves to achieving a two-State solution. The Israeli occupation and Israeli settlement activities remain the main problem and must stop. Rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza must also stop. Donors need to see meaningful progress before the next AHLC meeting in September, which should be convened at the political level. We need to address the tough questions regarding the continued relevance of our efforts and strategies as donors. I appeal to the donors to continue to provide funding for the Palestinian Authority during this difficult transition.

The President: I now give the floor to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement delivered by Mr. Mohammad Khazaee, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Helping to build a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East is one of the main challenges of the United Nations. The lack of respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and self-determination of the countries of the South have been recurrent practices of colonialists and imperialists in times past. Even today, those practices are still used to retain their already questionable hegemony.

Now they are turning to new notions to disguise their purposes while relying on the most advanced technologies of the military, killing innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly. They sponsor the fragmentation of national States, fueling ethnic, religious and cultural differences while seeking to impose political models that are alien to the realities of countries that have their own historical traditions. They foster mercenary activities and spread terrorism in order to change the political and legal structures of countries and steal their wealth. The mass media organizations present these terrorists as redeemers seeking independence and democracy. That interventionist logic disrupts peace and stability in the Middle East.

Venezuela is concerned about the warmongering actions of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people, which systematically violates the human rights of that heroic people. The State of Israel keeps some 5,000 political prisoners in deplorable conditions. Arbitrary arrests, harassment and intimidation are the order of the day. The construction of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the criminal blockade against the people of Gaza continue. UNICEF estimates that each year, about 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17 are arrested, interrogated and detained by Israel's army, police and security agents.

Over the past decade, about 7,000 cases of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment in the Israeli prison system have been corroborated. Since 1947, the State of Israel has failed systematically to implement the relevant resolutions of the United Nations advocating a two-State solution, shirking its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. The principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, are ignored by Israel. It is undeniable that those who, by act or omission, support such policies bear their share of responsibility for the situation.

Following the adoption in the General Assembly of resolution 67/19, granting the status of non-member observer State at the United Nations, the occupying Power withheld legitimate Palestinian tax revenues and defiantly asserted that it would continue to build its illegal settlements in order to make a State of Palestine unviable. The occupying Power is attempting to change the cultural and historical identity of the Palestinian people, thereby compromising its territorial integrity and self-determination.

The Venezuelan people admire the endurance of the Palestinian people and support the right of Palestine to be a full Member of the United Nations, in accordance with the provisions of its founding Charter. We demand that Israel withdraw to its pre-1967 borders in accordance with resolution 242 (1967). We endorse the right of the Palestinians to have East Jerusalem as their capital. We insist that the Palestinian refugees enjoy their right to return to their homeland. We demand the release of Palestinian prisoners, and an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan. Those who have committed crimes covered by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court must pay for their crimes.

Our delegation stresses the importance of the special meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held on 17 and 18 April in Caracas. At that meeting, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, denounced the apartheid being practiced in the occupied Palestinian territories through an inhumane and infamous separation with zones, facilities, roads, transport and permits only for Israelis. It is scandalous that Palestinians require special permits to enter and move within their own territory. Venezuela endorses these demands of the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Bolivarian Government believes that Syria must be respected. The only way to settle the conflict in that country is through political dialogue between the Syrian authorities and the opposition — an agreement among the Syrians themselves. We support the efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States to Syria, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, and we express our concern over the effort to diminish or manipulate the importance of mediation and dialogue as the ways par excellence to achieve peace, while irresponsibly promoting war in order to dismember a sovereign State.

Venezuela deplores the fact that arms are being supplied from outside to groups involved in terrorist activities that refuse to take part in any political dialogue. Such interference by foreign Powers constitutes a clear violation of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, as they apply to Syria. The countenancing of diplomatic recognition by the United Nations of irregular groups acting independently of the Syrian State and using violence and terrorism to achieve their political aims is a undesirable precedent for international law. A negotiated solution among Syrians themselves is indispensable, urgent and essential. We encourage peace and will support the efforts of all those who genuinely seek it.

In Venezuela we cherish the ultimate goods — life and peace — and we will defend the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Abdullah (Malaysia): I wish to thank you and your country, Rwanda, Mr. President, for convening today's important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. My delegation would also like to express its appreciation to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. Malaysia associates itself with the statements delivered, respectively, by the representatives of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by Djibouti, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Let me begin by addressing the most pressing priority for my delegation, which is the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Despite last month's visit to the Middle East by the President of the United States, we have yet to see any meaningful progress on a two-State solution. Malaysia is deeply disturbed about the condition of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees who have been unlawfully detained by the occupying Power. It is a mockery of the rule of law that Israel, which time and again declares itself to be the only democracy in the Middle East, unlawfully detains elected Palestinian officials, as well as women and children. We are extremely concerned about the fact that a number of detainees have died in prison, which many Palestinians fear has been the result of torture by their Israeli captors. My delegation also condemns Israel's disproportionate use of violence against peaceful protesters opposing the maltreatment of Palestinian prisoners, which resulted, unfortunately, in casualties, including several teenagers.

Malaysia continues to strongly condemn Israel's ongoing settlement activities, which the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and the International Court of Justice, as well as the Security Council itself, have all declared to be illegal. If those bodies indeed sincerely believe that those settlements should be outlawed, they should join Malaysia in condemning the even more heinous practice of preventing Palestinians from building on and farming their own lands. We should not fool ourselves by thinking that Israeli settlers are innocently exploring unoccupied plots of land and untapped resources, seeking a brighter and more virtuous future. The harsh reality is that those illegal settlers have consistently committed acts of violence and harassment against Palestinians, and have deliberately invaded, stolen from or damaged Palestinian-owned olive groves during harvest time. Even the water from aquifers in the region is being diverted by settlers into Israeli pipes, to be used, among other purposes, for irrigating crops originally tended by Palestinians. One does not need to guess who will also benefit from selling overpriced water back to its rightful Palestinian owners, who are themselves denied the right to drill for water in their lands.

Sadly, while at the village level Israeli settlers coordinate to build houses on Palestinian soil, there is a similar degree of coordination in the macro-level planning and development of the E-1 area in order to undermine the future and viability of a State of Palestine. The international community may have awoken a little too late to prevent the illegal settlement activities, but now we should not hesitate to condemn and take action on the incidents of settler violence and other illegal acts, before the consequences become even greater.

The illegal blockade in Gaza remains in place, despite the urgent need to resolve the serious humanitarian situation there, especially with regard to the food security of its residents. Israel also continues to restrict entry for building materials, including those that could be utilized for building much-needed educational and health facilities. The occupying Power is literally taking away the building blocks for the peace process, and at the same time is starving the population to death. Malaysia therefore demands a complete and

immediate end to the illegal blockade. What is left for the Palestinians when their homes, land, food, water, groves, mosques, schools and hospitals have been taken away? There are many wrongs that must be addressed concerning the question of Palestine. In that regard, Malaysia reiterates its support for an independent State of Palestine in all of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem as its capital.

Malaysia would also like to underline its concerns about the situation in Syria. We have always believed that a political solution to the crisis there is achievable, but it should be based on resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), as well as the joint communiqué of the Action Group for Syria issued in Geneva on 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). My delegation underlines the need for a Syrian-led inclusive political process that is acceptable to the Syrian people and meets their collective aspirations and legitimate rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): During the reopening of the Security Council Chamber last week, it was noted that the Chamber is possibly the most important room in the world. That is because of the Council's responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In the case of Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, it is clear that the Council has not been able to live up to its responsibility. In those two cases the Council has been sidelined, owing to its own inaction. That not only reflects negatively on the United Nations and the members of the Council, it is also bad for world peace. In that regard, Iceland wholeheartedly supports the sentiments expressed by the leaders of various United Nations agencies in an article published in the *New York Times* on 15 April, which ended with the words "Enough! Summon and use your influence, now, to save the Syrian people and save the region from disaster." The Council does not have the luxury of waiting while Syria is destroyed in front of our eyes. A political solution has to be found.

That brings me to the unresolved question of Palestinian refugees, since they are being uprooted once again as a result of the civil war in Syria. Of the half-million Palestinian refugees in Syria, 400,000 are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. Approximately 200,000 are internally displaced in Syria, and 42,000 have fled to Lebanon, where the situation in the Palestinian camps is, to say the least, very difficult to begin with. That turn of events should be a wake-up call for the international community to realize how urgent it is that we find a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees, as is called for in General Assembly resolution 194 (III). They have been waiting for 65 years. The civil war has also drawn attention to the unresolved question of the occupied Syrian Golan, which also needs a plan of action from the Security Council in the light of the developments on the ground.

As there has been no progress in the peace process since the last open debate (see S/PV.6906), I will focus on the role of the Security Council and some of the activities taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories, which clearly demonstrate the dire realities of the occupation and that the situation on the ground is far from being stagnant, unlike the peace process.

In this regard, we call attention to the deteriorating security situation for the Palestinians, with notable increases in fatalities and injuries caused by Israeli forces, as well as continued settler's violence; continued demolitions of Palestinian property, with a total of 192 structures having been demolished since the beginning of this year, resulting in the displacement of 355 people, according to information provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; continued and accelerated settlement activities, which are illegal under international humanitarian law and should be stopped altogether; the high number of Palestinian children between the ages of 12 and 17 who are arrested, interrogated and detained each year by the Israelis, amounting altogether to approximately 700 children every year, according to UNICEF; and the fact that there appears to be a pattern of ill treatment of child detainees.

Finally, Iceland would like to take this opportunity to urge the Palestinians to reinforce their efforts towards reconciliation, which is largely in their own power to achieve.

Iceland would once again like to reiterate its calls on Security Council to take on a more active role in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, considering the extreme asymmetry between the two parties and the need for impartial intervention, including by visiting the State of Palestine, reaffirming the illegality of the settlements, and accepting the application of the State of Palestine for United Nations membership in light of

the overwhelming support of the membership for the Palestinians' inalienable right to self-determination.

Finally, as regards Syria, Iceland would like to reiterate its calls on the Council to refer the situation since March 2011 to the International Criminal Court, and to come to a common position on how to address the civil war in Syria and its humanitarian consequences.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Allow me at the outset to thank the Rwandan presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate. We are also grateful to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his briefing.

Before I go further, the delegation of Indonesia would like to associate itself with the statements made by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Permanent Representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Like other members of the international community, Indonesia remains concerned over the absence of progress in the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Attempts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations between the two parties have been made to no avail. Nonetheless, we are encouraged by the recent efforts of the concerned parties to revive the path of peace, and create an atmosphere conducive to progress. In this regard, Indonesia remains fervently supportive of the two-State solution of Israel and a viable and independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the principle of land for peace and a just and comprehensive peace consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map of the Quartet, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Yet, Israeli policy in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially its continued illegal settlement activities, continues to prove to be an intractable obstacle towards that objective. Continued Israeli settlement activity not only compounds the problem of the fragmentation of the West Bank, but also signals a complete absence of commitment to engaging the Palestinians in fair and realistic negotiations.

In Gaza, the humanitarian situation remains debilitating as Israel's severe blockade hinders the movement of people and goods, thereby leading to increasing unemployment and the shrinking of private businesses and economic activities. Accordingly, Indonesia again urges Israel to stop ignoring and defying relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, which it has done without repercussion or consequence thus far.

It is discouraging to note that within the past year, there has been only one positive development in the Palestinian cause. That was last November's historic admission to the United Nations of Palestine as a non-member observer State. Regretably, that action of the General Assembly was met with extreme retaliatory measures by Israel. We are extremely concerned over Israel's continued inhumane and unlawful detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including children and women, who continue to be subjected to mental and physical mistreatment without recourse to just and impartial legal proceedings.

Many members of the international community, including Indonesia, have persistently condemned Israeli actions. Yet Israel continues to demonstrate its disregard for international law. We call on the international community to work harder to consolidate our efforts against Israel's violations of international law, and to ensure justice and freedom for the people of Palestine.

On the situation in Syria, a humanitarian catastrophe has regrettably continued to evolve, without proper response from the international community, including the Council. The situation on the ground has become so dire that it now threatens the stability of the region.

Against this unfolding crisis, earnest efforts to stop the violence must commence immediately. Members of the Council must put their differences aside and find the best way to convince all parties to the conflict to halt the violence. The grave humanitarian situation on the ground, particularly with reference to refugees and displaced persons, must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Finally, we must start without delay a political process that will lead to a permanent solution to the conflict, in accordance with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Govender (South Africa): South Africa thanks Mr. Feltman for his briefing to the Council. We

congratulate Rwanda on assuming the presidency of the Council this month.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Today's debate is a welcome opportunity to underscore once again the importance of finding a lasting solution to the situation in the Middle East in general, and the question of Palestine in particular. As we have said in the past, these meetings have degenerated into talk shops about the situation, with countries restating their already known positions but without producing any meaningful outcome. The sad part about this is that, while we continue participating in these routine meetings, the people of Palestine suffer every day under the yoke of an illegal occupation, with the occupying Power relentlessly underming international law, including the resolutions of the Council, with impunity.

South Africa remains deeply concerned at the impasse in the Middle East peace process. Despite the recent efforts of the United States leadership to revive the peace process, the status quo remains. We hope that the new coalition Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu will remove all obstacles to the resumption of peace talks, including the construction of illegal settlements, and return to the negotiating table as soon as possible and in good faith.

Needless to say, the settlements are not only illegal under international law, but also remain a major stumbling block to the resumption of direct negotiations and the achievement of sustainable peace. The Israeli settlement activities are confiscating Palestinian territory essential for a future State and seek to isolate East Jerusalem from other main Palestinian cities, thereby seriously threatening the very achievability of the two-State solution in line with the overwhelming call for the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting peacefully alongside the State of Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel should immediately stop its settlement activities as an obligation under various Security Council resolutions and international law.

With regard to the continuing violence, South Africa reiterates its condemnation of all acts of violence, regardless of where they come from, as they undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We are especially concerned by the continued abuses perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their property, including the uprooting of olive trees, assaulting and firing on Palestinians, and the demolition of Palestinian homes, mosques, churches and cemeteries. We hope that the Israeli authorities will take action against the perpetrators of such acts of aggression.

Israel's announcement last month of its intention to restart the monthly transfer of $100 million to Palestine was long overdue, and we remind Israel that the transfer of that money, which should never have been held back, is a requirement under the 1993 Oslo Agreements. We also welcome the decision of the United States Government to unblock of about $500 million, which was blocked after Palestine was admitted as a non-member observer State last year. We reiterate our view that the withholding of the funds is an illegal and immoral retributive act that constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian population and negatively affects the effectiveness of the Palestinian authority.

South Africa is concerned about the critical financial challenges that the Palestinian Authority faces. These challenges have the potential to reverse the gains made by Palestine in its institution-building project and to render the country unstable as service delivery declines. In that connection, we call on Israel to urgently lift all restrictions to allow for the development of the private sector, trade and other economic activities that could stimulate economic growth and address the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability in the short-to-medium term. Sustained economic development is also critical to addressing the deep needs of ordinary Palestinians and to lift them out of abject poverty.

We have also taken note of the resignation of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and hope that his successor will provide the necessary leadership to ensure the socioeconomic and political stability of Palestine.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the plight of the Palestinians who are illegally held in Israeli jails. We deplore the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh in March this year, whose death could have been avoided had it not been for medical neglect by the Israeli authorities. Israel should equally address and improve the living conditions of prisoners in order to end the ensuing hunger strike. Palestinian prisoners have long lived under appalling conditions in Israeli jails and the international community has not done much about their

plight. In that regard, we call on Israel to respect the human rights of all Palestinian prisoners and abide by relevant international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel should ensure their safety, allow access to them by family members and respect their basic human rights.

We reiterate our deep concern about the abuse of the human rights of Palestinian children and their detention. We are all very aware of the long-lasting adverse psychological effects that this will have on this vulnerable group. We have taken note of the February 2013 UNICEF report which, among other things, concluded that:

> "Each year approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17, the great majority of them boys, are arrested, interrogated and detained by Israeli army, police and security agents. In the past 10 years, an estimated 7,000 children have been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned within the Israeli military justice system — an average of two children each day".

Regarding the situation in Gaza, South Africa remains deeply concerned about Israel's continued blockade. We call for an end to that man-made and protracted humanitarian situation through the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. The blockade and restrictions imposed are in violation of international humanitarian law and contrary to the will of the international community as expressed in a number of Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009).

The efforts of the international community towards alleviating the humanitarian situation in Gaza are commended. For its part, South Africa has contributed an amount of 2 million rand to the humanitarian programmes run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

South Africa has always maintained that the future of Palestine is significantly dependent on the unity of its people. In that connection, we therefore encourage the Palestinians to strive for unity. In particular, we implore Hamas and Fatah to work together and collectively consolidate the gains of the Palestinian people. Learning from our own experience, we believe that intra-Palestinian unity is essential for long-term reconciliation and sustainable peace in Palestine.

In conclusion, the deteriorating situation in the broader region should not detract from our focus on achieving a permanent negotiated settlement between the two sides. It is therefore incumbent on the Security Council and the Quartet to continue to carry out their responsibilities without fear or favour and with increased focus. We further call on the Council and other stakeholders to accelerate efforts towards the holistic resolution of the Middle East crisis, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

The President: I call on the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Allow me to express my delegation's deep appreciation to you, Sir, for having convened this open debate, which provides us an opportunity to share views on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Not so long ago, my delegation delivered a statement in this Chamber in which we highlighted the significance of the transformative events ushered in by the wave of revolution in the Middle East inspired by a yearning for freedom and change. The international community has not been oblivious to the changing dynamics in the Middle East. While we as the community of nations respect the aspirations and the will of the people of that region to live in peace and dignity, we have a role to play in helping them achieve lasting peace and a sustainable livelihood.

As the people of the Middle East continue to strive for a better future, we need to play our part in helping them reconstruct, develop and build strong, inclusive and sustainable institutions of governance. Because we wish for the citizens of the Middle East what we wish for ourselves, we stand ready and willing to contribute in whatever way we can in shaping the Middle East landscape in order to improve the quality of life of the people.

It is for this reason that, under volunteer platforms such as CAPMATCH, my country pledges to support the people of the Middle East through tried and studied lessons of electoral conduct, democratic governance, public administration and the strengthening of enforcement agencies.

There is no doubt that the Middle East of yesteryear is completely different from the Middle East we know

now. It is a Middle East that is undergoing rapid socioeconomic and cultural transitions as part of globalization. Every day a new story unfolds, a new chapter in history is written and a new beginning dawns on the horizon.

Turning to the situation in Syria, my delegation continues to be concerned about the continued perpetration of violence and the increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation in that country, which now has the potential to turn into a humanitarian catastrophe. The people of Syria continue to endure incalculable hardship and violent repression at the hands of the Al-Assad regime. Millions remain internally displaced, while others have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

In that regard, my delegation will continue to condemn such attacks perpetrated against innocent civilians, in particular women and children. We call on the international community to continue its efforts to exert pressure in order to bring the perpetrators of those heinous crimes to justice.

We specifically call on the Security Council, as the custodian of international peace and security, to live up to its obligations, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. How long will we remain bystanders while fellow human beings continue to be subjected to indignity and to be massacred by the very people who purport to have their interests at heart?

On the question of Palestine, Botswana has stated and continues to consistently express its position in various forums, including this body, that there is merit in the two-State solution. We believe in the coexistence of Israel and Palestine living side by side as two sovereign States that share not only a border but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity. It is also imperative that all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions be respected by both parties.

In that regard, we encourage all parties involved in the peace process to sit at the negotiating table and to embrace dialogue. We specifically urge the State of Israel to cease the construction of settlements in the Gaza Strip and to enable the negotiation process to proceed, free of intimidation and pressure.

In conclusion, Botswana reiterates the point that a stable and peaceful Middle East that is free of violence, with nations living side by side in harmony, is not only good for the peace and security of the region, which has enormous potential. It will also provide an environment conducive to a prosperous and peaceful Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): Allow me first of all to express our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate on the Middle East.

The Middle East has been going through a significant period of transition and change. At the heart of the challenges that we face in the Middle East lies the Palestinian question. That issue continues to poison the prospects for regional cooperation, welfare and peace. Turkey continues to support a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and sitting side by side with us on an equal footing under this roof.

The revival of the Middle East process, which has been at a deadlock for some time, including the resumption of comprehensive peace negotiations between the parties for a just and lasting solution, has become increasingly crucial. That is especially important in the face of every passing hour, which makes a two-State solution less probable. In that regard, we appreciate the renewed engagement of the United States Administration in facilitating the peace process. Turkey, as always, is ready to contribute to all international efforts towards a just and lasting settlement.

Israel's illegal settlement activities present serious obstacles to the resumption of negotiations. It is time to seriously commit to and to respect the established parameters of the peace process. As such, the decision of the Human Rights Council in March to establish an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of Israeli settlements on the human rights of Palestinian people throughout the o occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is noteworthy. The worrying situation of Palestinian prisoners under Israeli custody continues to be a great source of concern, which, as also demonstrated in the past month, has the potential to derail any desired advancement in the peace talks.

On that note, I would like to reiterate our position of denouncing violence regardless of the motives behind it. The illegal blockade on Gaza is

not sustainable. We expect the Israeli Government to lift the blockade, in accordance with its bilateral and multilateral commitments. The arbitrary closures of border crossings and other punitive measures against the civilian population in Gaza are counterproductive to what we are trying to achieve.

In the meantime, we shall continue to give our full support to Palestinian reconciliation, which, we believe, constitutes one of the pillars for peace in the Middle East. That important requirement should not be put on the back burner, behind the peace negotiations. It is also important that the Palestinian parties understand that reconciliation will deliver recognition of their role towards peace. Trusting the leadership of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, we will continue to urge the parties for an expedited outcome to their efforts. The international community should also be ready to lend its support to a Palestinian unity Government, followed by the holding of elections.

Turkey will continue to support the peace process, as well as the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people, for an internationally recognized statehood, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Allow me to touch upon the humanitarian disaster just across our border with Syria. With more than 70,000 dead, 1.3 million refugees, 4.5 million internally displaced and 6 million people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, the Syrian crisis is the fastest growing humanitarian crisis in the world. As we stated last week in the Chamber (see S/PV.6949), the international community has the moral responsibility to support the Syrian people in their struggle. That must be done urgently, collectively and decisively. The average number of daily crossings by Syrians into neighbouring countries has reached 8,000. It is not realistic to expect those countries to continue to absorb the influx of Syrian refugees at its current intensity. We believe that, pending a political solution, the international community should start to discuss unexplored ways and means to address the problems and needs of the internally displaced persons within Syria and to find alternative destinations for those who choose to leave their country because they feel insecure.

The foreign ministers of 11 countries of the Group of Friends of Syria, at its meeting in Istanbul last Saturday, agreed that immediate action must be taken to bring the Syrian conflict to an end. On the sidelines of the meeting, the Syrian National Coalition reiterated its very important vision of the new Syria – a democratic and pluralistic State based on the rule of law, where all Syrians, man and woman, will be equal, regardless of their ethnic, religious and sectarian backgrounds. Those statements are encouraging only as long as the international community unites and works hand in hand for all universal values in which we believe.

Let me conclude by sharing the view that 2013 is vital for peace in the Middle East. Now is the time for sincere and concrete action. There is an ever-growing need for concerted action towards a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Laram (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Two decades have passed since the launch of the peace process in its current form. However, it continues to be a failure because it focuses on managing the issue instead of on dealing with the root causes, namely, the continued Israeli occupation. Despite that failure, we believe that the window of opportunity remains open in the form of the Arab Peace Initiative, which has been on the table for over a decade. Arab countries continue to affirm their commitment to that peace plan. However, it is also clear that the window will not remain open indefinitely. It is therefore important to intensify efforts and work very seriously and quickly in order to take advantage of the opportunity before it is too late.

Based on the foregoing, the recent Arab League summit meeting, which was held last month in Doha, decided to form a ministerial committee headed by Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar. The committee has been given the task of liaising with the Security Council and the capitals of certain influential countries in order to promote the Arab Initiative. We hope that that effort will receive a positive response. It is important to pressure Israel to put an instant end to the settlement projects in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and to hold it to its commitments, including releasing prisoners that have been held since before the Oslo Accords, terminating the unfair and aggressive siege of the Gaza strip and ceasing to tighten the noose around the Palestinian economy.

The international community cannot turn a blind eye to efforts to Judaize the city of Jerusalem. It is an Arab city that will continue to be proudly Arab with

its different religions and ethnicities. We would like to affirm that there is no Palestinian State without Jerusalem and there is no Jerusalem without the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

It is also important to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation as a prerequisite for a just and comprehensive peace. All parties must work together in order to support and encourage all efforts that aim to achieve that reconciliation, instead of undermining them.

The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate. Despite the ongoing military escalation, we note that the Syrian regime continues to lose control on the ground. Therefore, its insistence on remaining in power has forced it to go to extremes and attempt to impose a military solution using various methods against the steadfast Syrian people. Although the regime is legally and morally responsible for the protection of its people, it unfortunately continues to use excessive force, perpetrate massacres and target residential areas and sanctuaries, such as refugee centres, schools, hospitals, bakeries and houses of worship, even historical buildings and archeological sites. That confirms what is already clear to everyone — the regime has lost its legitimacy.

A few days ago, the forces of the Syrian regime and the militias supporting it committed another massacre, this time in Jdeidet al-Fadel, where they shelled and destroyed the only bakery in town. The massacre of Jdeidet al-Fadel and other massacres in Darayya, Houla, Karm al-Zeitoun and Al-Qubair and other placess are all crimes against humanity, that is, crimes against us all that are a source of shame for the regime in the eyes of humankind as a whole.

One of the most dangerous forms of escalation in Syria seen recently is the reported use of chemical weapons. In that regard, the fact-finding mission formed by the Secretary-General to bring out the relevant facts and investigate the various repercussions of those allegations, is of crucial importance.

The briefings by United Nations humanitarian affairs officials to the Council last Thursday (S/PV.6949) showed that it has been impossible to find a humanitarian solution to the Syrian crisis — the most dangerous humanitarian crisis in the world. We commend the efforts of the United Nations and the pledges of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. However, we are concerned that the humanitarian crisis is deteriorating so quickly and in a manner that is beyond the international community's ability to respond in terms of aid and assistance. The danger is not limited to Syria alone; rather, the crisis has started to spread to neighbouring countries and threaten the entire region.

We would like to remind the Council that the longer the Syrian crisis remains unresolved as a result of the reluctance of the international community to resolve it and support the Syrian people, the harder it becomes to achieve a political solution, thus giving more space to the cycle of violence and the growth of extremism. In that regard, I would like to refute the lie that the Syrian regime has been peddling, namely, that its remaining in power is the only guarantee of safety for the minorities. In fact, the truth is completely the opposite — the oppression by the regime and its belittling of the Syrian people and homeland threaten every part of Syrian society.

Facing the urgency of the crisis, the Arab League has, from the very beginning, exerted efforts to create an atmosphere that would encourage the emergence of a peaceful solution. In that regard, we supported an important step, namely, the unification of the Syrian opposition in its political and military wings under the umbrella of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. That step was in response to an important demand by the United Nations and the international community. We believe that the United Nations must now, in accordance with Chapter VIII of its Charter, support the efforts of the League of Arab States in its capacity as the regional organization for the region where the Syrian crisis is unfolding.

The State of Qatar, in cooperation with most Arab States and a large number of other States, is submitting a draft resolution to the General Assembly aimed at supporting international, regional and United Nations efforts to achieve a political solution to the Syrian crisis. In that regard, we would like to note that we believe that it is of utmost importance for the Security Council to take unified action to put an end to the humanitarian catastrophe. The failure of the Security Council to take a position, stop the crisis and protect the Syrian people, as well as the Council's failure to deal effectively with the Palestinian cause, will have very dangerous repercussions for the Middle East region as a whole.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to begin by thanking you for convening today's meeting and for the manner in which you have been leading the work of the Security Council this month. My delegation endorses the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Yet again, we are meeting in the Security Council to discuss the subject of the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Yet again, we state our deep solidarity with that brotherly people. Year after year, for over 60 years, at various times, we have denounced the illegal occupation by Israel and its expansionist policies, which continue to undermine all efforts to achieve peace and reject the establishment of a Palestinian State that is sovereign and independent. Now more than ever and subsequent to the adoption by the majority of the international community of General Assembly resolution 67/19, we are inescapably committed to rectifying the historic injustice committed against Palestinian people. We consider that the vote in favour of the resolution by the majority of Member States constitutes a statement by the international community that Palestine complies with all the criteria laid down in the Charter to be a full Member State ready to assume its responsibilities as a nation that loves peace.

Our delegation voted in favour of the resolution out of solidarity and based on our position of principle in support of the Palestinian cause, which Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega Saavedra has always supported. Since the 1980s, Nicaragua has fully recognized the existence of the Palestinian State. Unfortunately, such full recognition has not yet been achieved owing to the lack of political will on the part of certain countries that are members of the Security Council, which, through the use of their veto power, stand in the way of that legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people. As the veto remains the main obstacle to the achievement of peace and security, it is time for the Security Council to give thought, in a positive and unconditional manner, to the Palestinian State's request for full membership. We must continue to support all Palestinian efforts so that, sooner or later, Palestine can sit beside us as the 194th State Member of the United Nations.

Israel, following the decisive recognition by the General Assembly of Palestine's status as a non-member observer State, has, as a reprisal, stepped up its policy of occupation and its criminal blockade, continuing the construction of settlements and refusing to dismantle existing ones. Ignoring the will of the international community and causing the peace process to stagnate, in an attempt to impose conditions on negotiations, it continues to alter the demographic and religious makeup of the Palestinian territory, which represents a serious violation of international law.

Peace in the Middle East does not mean that we need only resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; a solution must also include the situation in the Israeli-occupied territories in Lebanon and Syria. Moreover, it should include peace in all countries of the region.

Nicaragua reiterates its appeal for respect for the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, consistent with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and calls on Israel to comply with all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We also reiterate our solidarity with Palestinian prisoners and political detainees, particularly women and children, who are being held in Israeli prisons and subjected to inhumane ill-treatment by those authorities. That has led to hunger strikes and even to the deaths of some detainees. We call for the immediate release of all Palestinians arbitrarily imprisoned by Israel. We call on the international community to continue its efforts in the context of a global campaign to show our solidarity in connection with this important problem.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, of which Nicaragua is a member, and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the efforts made to ensure the successful outcome of the recent meeting held in Caracas in solidarity with the Palestinian people and the achievement of the Palestinian State. The declaration adopted at that meeting will give a solid impetus to efforts undertaken in 2013, emphasizing the decision, as the Chairman of our Committee has just said, to request the General Assembly to make 2014 the year of solidarity with Palestine, in order to undertake a global campaign to put an end to the Israeli occupation.

We also welcome the regional Palestine seminar to be held in Ecuador in the coming year, which represents a unique opportunity for the Latin American and Caribbean region to show once again its full support for the Palestinian State.

Nicaragua reiterates its full solidarity with the Palestinian people in their quest to achieve their freedom and the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination, including with respect to the establishment of a Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, laying the foundation for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East with both States, Palestine and Israel, living in peace in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the aspirations of all peace-loving countries.

Lastly, we reiterate that it is time to put an end to the policy of double standards used by some permanent members of the Security Council and their allies. In Syria, instead of promoting dialogue and reconciliation, they are promoting violence and the militarization of the conflict, arming extremist groups with a view to achieving regime change. Such violence and militarization will have serious repercussions throughout the Middle East, but nonetheless those same members engage in delaying tactics so as to not recognize a Palestinian State, whose recognition and establishment would lead to the just and lasting peace that is so needed in the Middle East region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to thank you for having convened this meeting and to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency this month.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has consistently reaffirmed its firm stance on the Palestinian question, which is based on the need to implement the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and to respect internationally agreed terms of reference. Efforts to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question can be successful only on the basis of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in keeping with United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the decisions of the international Quartet and the calls to lift the continued illegal Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip. We call on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and to immediately move to lift the siege and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people living in the Gaza Strip.

At the summit held recently in Doha, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain stated that many recent developments and variables had set new conditions and created platforms for a peace in the Middle East based on the two-State solution, through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on its national soil, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

His Majesty also noted the need to adopt a new approach to the peace process in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region, as well as the need to revitalize its mechanisms on all tracks, as those mechanisms have been brought to a standstill by Israel's refusal to abide by all relevant international resolutions. Such efforts should be carried out in coordination with the international community as a whole, on the basis of the terms of reference of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit and the principle of land for peace, ensuring that an end is put to the Israeli occupation, which started in 1967, and to settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in particular holy Jerusalem.

A peaceful resolution of the Middle East problem must ultimately lead to an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, as well as the resumption of Israel's withdrawal from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in keeping with the relevant Security Council resolutions. It must also entail the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with holy Jerusalem as its capital, and offer a just solution that would guarantee the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We would reiterate also the need to implement all relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and to unconditionally abide by the resolutions of international legitimacy, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits any demographic or geographical changes to areas under occupation.

Let me say in closing that peace in the Middle East is not just one option; rather, it is the only option. That will require the implementation of the two-State solution, of which the Arab Peace Initiative is one of the most important foundations. That requires that Israel, the occupying Power, stop its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, which only

undermine all efforts, be they Arab or international, to achieve peace.

We call once again on the Security Council and other mechanisms, including the Quartet, to exert every effort to resolve this historical crisis in a manner that serves the interests of the peoples of Israel and of Palestine and preserves regional and international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Lasso Mendoza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Rwanda, as President of the Security Council for this month, for convening this meeting. My delegation would like to express our views on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. We take note of the statement by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. My delegation would like to align itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Government of Ecuador reiterates its concern over the protracted discussions in the Security Council on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. At this time of international political and economic upheaval, it is important to struggle for a just international system. In that context, the issue of Palestine has raised the international community's awareness of the question of what the United Nations should do. Member States should, now more than ever, be interested in ensuring the implementation of existing international laws and resolutions that advocate an end to the abusive use of force by Israel in Palestine.

One hundred and thirty Member States of this Organization supported the appeal made by the President of the Palestinian Authority on 29 November 2012 to grant Palestine the status of Observer State. That is an important achievement that must be supported and must serve as the basis for full-fledged recognition of the State of Palestine. It is time to seek out mechanisms that allow us to make progress in the efforts for peace and to enhance the capacity of the State of Palestine to meet the security needs of its own people. It is up to the Security Council to assume its responsibility for having enabled the continued Israeli violations of international law, which has allowed that country to maintain a status of immunity and impunity.

After the adoption of resolution 67/19, the Israeli Government announced that it would not recognize Palestine as a State or recognize any change in the situation of Palestinians. After 28 November 2012, in direct contravention of the peace process, Israel intensified its settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, and the situation deteriorated further with illegal and arbitrary detentions of Palestinians and the death of some of those detained. In the same vein, the demolition of houses has caused Palestinians to be displaced to neighbouring countries, undermining the entire peace process and inviting the condemnation of the international community against Israel.

Another Israeli reaction to the recognition of the Observer State of Palestine was the withholding, for the past few months, of Palestinian tariff revenues, in complete disregard of the 1994 Paris Protocol, which was signed by Israel and is still in force. My country, Ecuador, believes that it is now time to implement the Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels (resolution 67/1), which is applicable to all States in equal measure and to international organizations, including the United Nations and its principal bodies, so that the respect and promotion of the rule of law and justice guides all their activities. In that respect, my delegation would like to call upon the Security Council to abandon its passive attitude towards Israeli abuses, as that leads, to a certain extent, to the Council's becoming complicit in them.

In conclusion, Ecuador appeals to the international community to continue to support the request submitted by the President of Palestine to promote it from the category of Observer State to that of a full-fledged Member State of the United Nations, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the only way that we will achieve peace and security in the Middle East and thus peace for all Member States of the United Nations.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.6951

Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6951st meeting
Thursday, 25 April 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gasana	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Meek
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2013/220)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-31287 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2013/220)

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Spain to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2013/243, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France, the Russian Federation, Spain and the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2013/220, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, China, France, Guatemala, Luxembourg, Morocco, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2099 (2013).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.6952

Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6952nd meeting
Thursday, 25 April 2013, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gasana	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Meek
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2013/189)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-31293 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2013/189)

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Téte António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2013/242, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Australia, France, Luxembourg, Morocco, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Togo, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2013/189, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to a vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, China, France, Guatemala, Luxembourg, Morocco, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2100 (2013).

I now call on members of the Council who wish to make a statement after the voting.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation voted in favour of resolution 2100 (2013) in view of the importance of increasing assistance to the Republic of Mali in its efforts to deal with a complex and comprehensive crisis, as well as in response to a request by the country's authorities, supported by the relevant regional organizations. In that regard, we would like to stress that the primary responsibility for resolving the current problems belongs to Malians themselves. Every action and task of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), whose deployment was decided on today, must be directed exclusively at providing assistance to the Malian authorities.

In the context of the resolution adopted today, as well as the recently adopted resolution 2098 (2013) regarding the deployment of an Intervention Brigade within the framework of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are disturbed by the growing shift towards the military aspects of United Nations peacekeeping. What was once the exception now threatens to become unacknowledged standard practice, with unpredictable and unclear consequences for the security of United Nations personnel and their international legal status.

In that connection, according to the situation clearly delineated in the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Mali (S/2013/189), there should be a clear boundary between peacekeeping and enforcing peace. That is why we believe that MINUSMA's mandate excludes offensive or counter-terrorism operations. Such actions would be counter to the basic principles of peacekeeping. In the preamble to the resolution just adopted, the unshakeability of such principles was once again affirmed.

We believe that using Blue Helmets for the tasks involved in arresting those accused by the International Criminal Court, including through the use of force, is not part of United Nations peacekeeping and carries a number of risks for the peacekeepers, who could find themselves required to take part in actions that should be conducted by specially trained troops. It is quite clear here that a military solution does not exist for the Mali crisis. The activity of MINUSMA must be backed by tangible and palpable political processes, which would include political dialogue between the main Malian sides.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Coulibaly (Mali) (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour for me to take the floor during this meeting of the Security Council on the situation in Mali. First, I would like to sincerely congratulate Rwanda on its Council presidency — a very agreeable task — as well as all members of the Security Council for the remarkable work that they have accomplished during the month of April. I would also like to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his untiring efforts, not only towards a lasting solution to the serious Malian crisis but also for everything that he has done for peace, stability and development in the Sahel.

Security Council resolution 2100 (2013), which has just been adopted, is an important step in a process to stem the activities of terrorists and rebel groups in Mali — Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa, Ansar Dine and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad — to promote dialogue and reconciliation between Malians and to ensure peace and stability throughout the national territory. My delegation is particularly pleased by the adoption of that resolution, which seeks to transfer functions from the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) to the new United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), created under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mali is fully prepared to welcome the United Nations Mission, which will focus, inter alia, on stabilizing the main urban centres in the north, restoring the authority of the State, and providing support for the road map, including political dialogue and the electoral process, the protection of civilians, the promotion and protection of human rights as well as humanitarian assistance.

Thanks to the joint action of Operation Serval, the troops of AFISMA and the Malian security forces, significant progress has been achieved in the security area, particularly in taking back the main cities of the northern and central regions. Despite the hope raised by the success of the military operations, which has made it possible to progressively restore administration in certain areas, small cells of armed terrorists and rebels continue to present a serious threat to stability and the territorial integrity of Mali, as well as to peace and security in the region. That is why the Government of Mali welcomes the commitment of the international community to taking active measures to deter and prevent the return of armed rebel groups. As required by resolution 2100 (2013), the armed rebel groups must not only lay down their arms, but also immediately cease hostilities and unconditionally recognize the unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Mali.

Wars and conflicts have devastating consequences on development. There can be no doubt that there can be no sustainable development without peace and without security. That is why I would like, in this Chamber, to appeal to the international community for better coordination of its action in order to effectively respond to the immediate and long-term needs of Mali and the countries of the region in the areas of security, governance, development and humanitarian action. We dare to hope that the international conference of donors to be held in Brussels on 15 May to help Mali in its development will achieve the desired results. We take this opportunity to thank the countries that have announced donations to the conference organized by the African Union in Addis Ababa on 29 January for their support to AFISMA and the Malian security and defence forces. We would also ask them to honour their pledges, and we invite other Member States and regional and international organizations to join in the wave of solidarity.

As we speak, the transitional Government is actively involved in the implementation of the road map through, inter alia, the organization of fair, free and transparent elections and the beginning of an inclusive inter-Malian dialogue. Part of the dynamic is a dialogue and reconciliation commission, with the appointment of its Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen and 30 Commissioners representing the diversity of the Malian nation.

On behalf of the President of the Republic of Mali, Mr. Dioncounda Traoré, allow me, Mr. President, to thank you, the members of the Security Council and the Secretary-General for the untiring efforts that have led to the adoption of today's resolution. Along those lines, I would like to reiterate the determination of the transitional Government to fully cooperate with the Security Council and to play its role in the implementation of the resolution.

I would also like to pay a sincere tribute to France for having been able, while fully respecting international legality, to put an end to the crimes of the terrorists in Mali and for its commitment to support MINUSMA.

In conclusion, I would also like to express the sincere thanks of the Government of Mali to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and all our bilateral and multilateral partners, neighbouring countries and States of the region for their precious help as we deal with the Malian crisis. I would like to very much thank you for your kind attention.

The President: I now give the floor the obsevrver of the African Union.

Mr. António (*spoke in French*): Allow me to apologize, on behalf of President Buyoya, who was unable to come to this meeting as the result of a scheduling conflict. He is in the General Assembly, which is holding a special commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization of African Unity and the African Union. President Buyoya has therefore given me the task of speaking on his behalf.

"Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the Commission of the African Union and in my own personal capacity, to convey my gratitude to you, Sir, for having afforded us this opportunity to take the floor and deliver our message during the so important meeting on the situation in Mali. The Council will recall that the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States have been seized of the issue since the very eruption of the comprehensive and complex crisis that has struck Mali. The efforts of the two organizations will continue to be focused on assisting the Malian authorities to ensure that the country is able to restore its national unity, its territorial integrity and the constitutional order in a peaceful climate, one marked by genuine reconciliation between the various communities in Mali.

"To achieve that objective, the two organizations have advocated a double strategy based on two axes of action, one a political process and the other military action, if necessary. Of course, we focused first on a dialogue process, based on our belief that we had to use every possible peaceful way to resolve the situation before resorting to military action.

"With the subsequent realization that the political processes needed to be strengthened by a strategy requiring the armed groups to fulfil their commitments, we felt obliged to take the necessary steps for a possible military intervention in support of the political process. The attack on the town of Konna on 10 January 2013 by terrorist and criminal groups justified this approach. Indeed, that attack undermined the efforts at dialogue with elements among those armed groups, which we had been making up until that time, and led to the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).

"We have carried out all of these actions in close collaboration with the United Nations. It is therefore normal for us to support the initiative of transforming AFISMA into a United Nations mission. Indeed, we requested such a change. We support the decision to transform AFISMA into a United Nations stabilization mission. We welcome the fact that a number of our concerns with the draft resolution have been taken into account in the current text. We are encouraged by the statements made by several parties that our remaining concerns will be taken into account when it comes to implementing the resolution.

"As our efforts regarding the crisis in Mali proceed, and in the light of our experience and added value in certain areas, we vigorously advocate for the following points. First, the central political roles of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States should be recognized, in full partnership with the United Nations mission. In that regard, the two organizations would maintain a strong presence in Bamako to pursue their political commitment in Mali. Secondly, the practice of consultations that has characterized all of our joint action on Mali to date should continue, especially with respect to taking major decisions, such as choosing contingents and selecting military and civilian leadership. Thirdly, there must be strong coordination between AFISMA, the French force and the Malian army, which could be achieved through the appointment of liaison officers in the command structures of each force.

"The process of transforming AFISMA into a United Nations mission is an eloquent illustration of the partnership between Africa and the United Nations, which we strongly hope will lead to a lasting solution to the ongoing crisis in Mali and for the well-being of all of the Malian people."

The President: The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.6953

Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6953rd meeting

Thursday, 25 April 2013, 10.35 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Gasana	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Bliss
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Briens
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Munir
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Meek
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Letter dated 12 April 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2013/228)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-31299 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Letter dated 12 April 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2013/228)

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Côte d'Ivoire to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2013/244, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2013/228, which contains a letter dated 12 April 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire addressed to the President of the Security Council.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, China, France, Guatemala, Luxembourg, Morocco, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2101 (2013).

I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bamba (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): It a pleasure to see you, Mr. President, again presiding over this meeting.

My delegation takes note of the adoption of resolution 2101 (2013) pursuant to which the Security Council renews the sanctions measures regarding Côte d'Ivoire for the period of a year until 30 April 2014. It also extends the mandate of the Group of Experts tasked with reviewing the implementation of the sanctions regime on Côte d'Ivoire until 30 April 2014.

I would like to point out that the resolution comes at a time marked by considerable progress achieved by Government of Côte d'Ivoire at all levels, in particular with regard to stabilization, the security situation, political dialogue, national reconciliation and economic recovery. That undeniable situation, which was affirmed by the recent technical assessment mission that visited Côte d'Ivoire, is, fortunately, mentioned in the resolution that has just been adopted.

As resolution 2101 (2013) underscores, my delegation agrees that there are still significant that require that the efforts under way be continued. In that connection, my delegation would like to reaffirm the complete readiness of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to fully cooperate with the United Nations, including the Group of Experts of the Sanctions Committee, to implement the measures contained in this resolution, as well as in previous relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, my delegation hopes that, as mentioned in the resolution, the contribution of such measures to strengthening stability in Côte d'Ivoire will make it possible to envisage in the near future a possible additional modification or a partial or compete lifting of the sanctions regime on Côte d'Ivoire.

The President: There are no more names inscribed in the list of speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council will remain seized of the matter.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.